

FRANCE

Fostering knowledge
transfer and innovation
in agriculture, forestry,
and rural areas

Location
Renaie

Programming period
2014 - 2020

Measure
M20 – Technical assistance
and networking

Funding (EUR)
Total budget 622 718
EAFRD 264 032
National/Regional 233 485
Private 125 201

Project duration
2015 – 2018

Project promoter
L'Atelier Paysan

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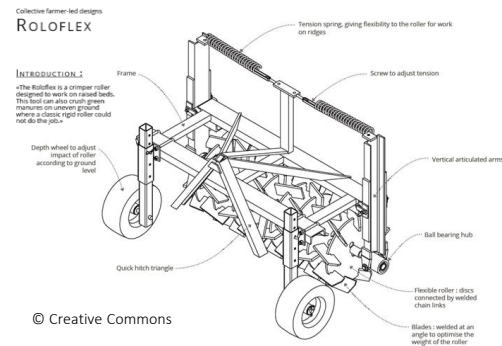
Website
www.latelierpaysan.org/Le-projet-USAGES-2133

A small group of young farmers started an initiative of collecting and sharing low tech on farm solutions, which then evolved into an digital open platform for disseminating innovations.

Summary

Using adapted working tools and getting assistance for 'do it yourself' projects are both technical and economic approaches that are seldom explored by conventional agricultural development. Yet, these approaches can have a decisive impact for setting up as a farmer, converting the existing farming practice into organic farming, or producing agronomic innovation in the field of agro-ecology.

EAFRD support helped to realise this peasants' knowledge base which is about collaborative research and development. It is openly accessible online in the form of detailed articles and technical tutorials, gathering more than 250 pages and over 50 plans for low-tech agro-ecological farming practice. The idea is that peasants' knowledge is a 'common good', to be distributed and modified freely.



Main results

USAGES project helped realise a free and open encyclopaedia of open low tech solutions for agriculture.

By 2017, 17 technical plans and tutorials were collectively tested and approved and 23 technical plans were under prototyping.

A section on rules and regulations related to farm buildings and machinery was developed, providing all the administrative and technical background information on risk, security, certification, etc.

Key Lessons & Recommendations

- ❑ The key notion behind these emerging peer to peer business models is their 'bridging' and 'enabling' functions. While supporting others to set up their own activity, they create and provide services at affordable price and fully targeted to the needs.
- ❑ The only weak area lies in the impossibility to measure the impact of the project as the knowledge is openly shared it is difficult to assess the changes, or effects, on society or the environment that follow from achieved outcomes remains a challenge.

Context

The Peasants' workshop – L'Atelier Paysan - was born in 2011, based on the assessment that most farmers produce individual innovation on their holdings, mainly by adjusting their machines and tools. They are not simply extracting agricultural raw material, they also invent, adapt and reuse. However, most often they do it in isolation. A small group of young farmers who recently started organic farming and permaculture began to jointly develop low-tech solutions and decided to create a digital platform in order to share and disseminate the outcomes of their innovations. This is how L'Atelier Paysan was born.

The wealth of creativity was such that it soon required more means in order to collect and document all these small-scale, low-tech innovations. The young farmers recorded, described, took photos and published detailed articles and technical plans on a web forum. They also delivered training sessions and provided technical assistance to other farmers in 'farm labs' (groups where prototypes are conceived, designed and tested).

The USAGES project expands on this initial movement with the cooperation of additional partners from the training and cooperative sectors, as well as the R&D Innovation department from one of the most important French agronomic schools.

The network was born in Rhone Alpes and rapidly expanded in the East (Alsace, Lorraine) and the West (Bretagne) before covering the whole of France.

Objectives

- Create the conditions for open innovation and the development of user-oriented tools and techniques for peasants and rural communities;
- Develop low-tech tools and techniques intended for the benefit of those who need it, creating common value (the 'Commons');
- Accelerate the transition to farming practice in agro-ecology;
- Expand the sharing of collaborative innovation processes in the field.

Activities

The USAGES project started in June 2015 with a 3 years' roadmap. In March 2016, a seminar was held in Paris, gathering all USAGES project' stakeholders around [keynote contributions](#). This event was organised and supported by the National Rural Network in the

framework of its call for projects '[Collective mobilisation for rural development](#)'.



During Year 1 (June 2015 – June 2016), most of the work consisted in making an inventory of peer learning processes and low-tech innovations stemming from users (farmers and rural communities). An index of these innovations is set up, available through an online tool with free search keywords. They include low-tech solutions for farm machinery and agricultural buildings and cover a large scope of production chains, including cattle breeding, winegrowing or market gardening. These innovations were collected during the mapping tours of L'Atelier Paysan, from farm to farm.

In addition, a dozen of tutorials and users' workshops have been organised, gathering around a thousand participants. These hands-on workshops or training modules are often co-organised with different stakeholders, according to the topic and the target group. For instance, a 3 days module on [innovative territorial strategies](#) was delivered in partnership with Cap Rural, the regional rural network for Auvergne – Rhône Alpes, targeting rural municipalities and NGOs.

A traveling exhibition of over 50 technical plans is also designed and translated in English. The need to exchange with foreign peers is fuelled by initial contacts taken during the first [Farm Hack UK](#) back in 2015, coordinated by the [Land Workers Alliance](#). Further contacts were built with [GartenCoop](#), a peri-urban cooperative located nearby Freiburg in Germany, and with other Romanian, Belgian, Spanish and Italian correspondents during the [European Nyéléni forum](#) on food sovereignty held in Cluj-Napoca (Romania) in October 2016. The participation of the project promoter to the International Fab Lab Festival in May 2016 in Toulouse (France) also contributed to promoting the initiative.

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Project partners

- The [Peasants' Workshop](#) (lead partner);
- [FADEAR](#) the umbrella organisation of ADEAR, small-scale groupings providing local training and job replacement services;
- [Inter AFOCG](#): French national network of organizations (AfoCG) providing lifelong vocational trainings in business development (accounting, management, strategy...) for farmers and rural inhabitants;
- [FNCuma](#) farm machinery cooperatives;
- [AgroParisTech \(UMR Innovation\)](#) a multidisciplinary research unit specializing in knowledge brokering processes and open science and technology movements;
- [CIRAD](#) the French research centre for agronomy and international cooperation in tropical and Mediterranean areas.

Key lessons

Several learning dimensions can be found in the USAGES project, all of them being highly transferable. The entrepreneurship dimension:

- Adult vocational training included in the learning curve as a sharing process among rural communities;
- Human resource development: people jointly developing low-tech solutions and techniques get new skills;

The social dimension:

- Open to anyone, non discriminatory;
- Social ties / human bonds as an intrinsic component of the project;
- Part of the social economy movement (in French: Economie Sociale et Solidaire).

It is interesting to note that women get more and more involved and increasingly register to the training workshops.

The most original aspect of this initiative is the collaborative dimension, the Peer-to-Peer approach from the idea to the project based upon the principles of the 'Commons'. In this context, the USAGES project is closely aligned with similar 'Do It Yourself' (DIY) or 'Do it with Others' (DiwO) movements where users openly share their knowledge. The most recent examples of this fast growing trend are the Fab Labs, the Living Labs, the Maker Spaces and other 'Tiers Lieux'. The key aspect of these emerging business models is their 'bridging' and 'enabling' functions. While supporting others to set up their own activity, they create and provide services to them (i.e. hiring material, training, etc.) at affordable price and fully targeted to the needs.

The only weak area lies in the impossibility to measure the impact of the project: as the knowledge is openly shared, the effective outcomes can be calculated (number of persons being trained, number of web visitors, downloading files, etc.) but assessing changes, or effects, on society or the environment that follow from achieved outcomes remains a challenge.

To conclude, user-centred innovations are not limited to machinery or farm holdings. The project partners are also concerned with organisational models and analytical tools. A participative design group is recently set up (March 2017) in order to develop open source software for mixed crop management in market gardening. The first results are expected in 2018.

Main Results

Ultimately, the main result of the USAGES project is the production of a free and open encyclopaedia, allowing anyone to dig into the resources but also to improve it with additional contributions.

At the time of drafting this good practice example (March 2017), 17 technical plans and tutorials were collectively tested and approved, and 23 technical plans were under prototyping. All this material is online, in French and in English.

In addition, a [special section](#) about rules and regulations related to farm buildings and machinery was developed, providing all the administrative and technical background information on risk, security, certification, etc.

Once a year, a national gathering is organised on a farm, with conferences, workshops, technical sessions, etc. The June 2016 event was the occasion to focus on user-centred innovations. A 16 pages [online flipbook](#) summarizes the main outcomes. The 2017 event is planned for the end of April near Valence and proposes various thematic workshops such as low-tech investment fiscal issues, animal-drawn machinery, farmer seeds' network, etc.

Additional sources of information

www.latelierpaysan.org/Index-de-trouvailles-paysannes

www.docdroid.net/spLcGqj/planches-outils-en.pdf.html

