

SWEDEN

Soil erosion & soil management

Location

Jönköping

Programming period

2014 – 2020

Priority

P4 – Ecosystems
management

Measure

M01 - Knowledge transfer
& information actions

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2018 – 2021

Project promoter

Jordbruksverket

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A new participatory approach for increasing landowners’ knowledge on how to manage drainage ditches that play a key role in Swedish agriculture.

Summary

A significant part of Sweden’s agricultural land depends on functioning soil drainage systems through ditches. As the climate is changing, weather patterns are predicted to change and extreme weather events, such as floods and droughts will become more common.



For Swedish agriculture to adapt to these changes, stakeholders will have to take action in developing an effective and continuous ditch management system. Currently, many ditches are not in good condition. To increase ditch management knowledge and know-how, the project designed a ditch management educational concept using ‘study circles’. Study circles offer a platform for learning and easy communication with the authorities. They also generate a bottom-up approach for good water management and climate adaption in Sweden.

Results

So far, 46 study circles have been organised in different parts of Sweden with 477 participants.

43 circle coaches have received training by attending two-day courses.

Direct benefits from the study circles include the increased knowledge among landowners on how to manage ditches. This allows them to develop sustainable maintenance strategies with several benefits, including less nutrient leakage and reduced nitrous oxide emissions.

Context

Climate change is predicted to disrupt weather patterns, and the likelihood of extreme weather events like floods and droughts is expected to increase. A large part of the agricultural land in Sweden depends on soil drainage through ditches, which can also reduce the problems that will arise during extreme weather events. Maintenance methods are therefore important for agricultural production, as well as to mitigate environmental problems, such as nutrient leakage. Many of the ditches in the country are co-owned. However, farmers and landowners often lack knowledge about their legal obligations and their rights connected to co-owned ditches. Furthermore, many ditches are not managed in an optimal way. Hence, it was necessary to raise awareness and increase stakeholders' knowledge on ditch management.

A working group consisting of participants from the Swedish Agriculture Agency - Jordbruksverket - and the Federation of Swedish Farmers (LRF) started to design the educational concept in 2017. Ditch issues can be difficult to resolve and at the same time affect many people. Therefore, the educational method selected was to organise study circles where farmers and landowners work together in groups. Educational material, including three films, was developed. A small number of people received training to become study circle coaches and test study circles where held. The concept was then evaluated together with the study circle coaches. This was the start of the project Study circles about ditches. The educational method and material developed during 2017 was transferred to the current project.

Objectives

The objective of the project is to increase stakeholders' knowledge of the functions of drainage ditches; the positive effects they bring; and how to effectively manage them.

Activities

Multiple stakeholders are involved in the project including the Swedish Agriculture Agency (Jordbruksverket), the Federation of Swedish Farmers (LRF) and Studieförbundet Vuxenskolan (SV).

During the project, all activities are taking place concurrently.

The study circles are held in five different Swedish regions. The circle meetings are attended by at least five people who receive between 9 and 20 hours of training in total. Groups meet three to six times. Every study circle

has one coach and his/her main task is to support the work done in the group. Depending on the interests within each study circle, different topics in relation to ditches can be prioritised. Questions from participants are also communicated to the Swedish Agriculture Agency through the study circle coach. The ease of communication is beneficial for both participants and the Swedish Agricultural Agency. The questions raised and discussed create an understanding of what ditch owners are concerned about and what ideas they have. In practice, this is a valuable bottom-up way of working on water issues in Sweden.

The study circle coaches participate in a two-day course before they can lead a study circle. The two-day course provides general knowledge about ditch management, as well as educational/training approaches and coaching strategies. These courses are held a couple of times a year for 10-15 participants. After their training, the circle coaches are financially compensated for the time they spend working with the circles. Anyone interested can apply to become a coach. Through the Swedish Agriculture Agency's network of contacts, people that are known to be knowledgeable on the subject are invited to become a coach and participate in the study circle coach training.

Some open events are arranged where people who are already part of a study circle and people who might be interested in joining one can participate. These open events can inspire people to sign up for a study circle, but they also provide an opportunity for the Swedish Agriculture Agency staff, farmers and landowners to meet and discuss.

Main results

So far, 46 study circles have been organised in different parts of Sweden with 477 participants.

43 circle coaches have received training by attending the two-day courses.

Direct benefits from the study circles include the increased knowledge on how to manage ditches. Through this process, stakeholders develop sustainable maintenance strategies with a number of benefits: reduced negative impacts during floods and droughts; decreased nutrient leakages; and reduced nitrous oxide emissions.

Study circles are a common educational concept in Sweden and have been used in many different areas and topics and can be easily replicated in other European countries.

Additional sources of information

n/a