



PRACTICE ABSTRACT NR. 9

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Problem analysis in Living Labs: What is the value of an advisory service? – the case of a vegetable growers' cooperative in Romania

Romania has a weak and fragmented Farm Advisory System while having the biggest number of small-scale farmers in Europe. These farmers find it hard to navigate among the ever changing legislation and market conditions. The problems within the sector, like malfunctioning distribution of foodstuff, low productivity and little investment relate to a lack of proper guidance on financial and marketing issues. The Romanian Living Lab (LL) focuses on improving the access to timely and reliable fiscal and financial information for Vărăști - Carrefour cooperative, located 30km from Bucharest, the country's biggest consumer market. The Cooperative has over 100 members, small-scale vegetable growers, currently supplying to Carrefour supermarket, the second biggest retailer in Romania. Carrefour was instrumental in the establishment of the cooperative and currently is its only customer, reportedly supplying 37% of the supermarket's fresh produce in 2017. Nevertheless, while membership increased by 25% within its first year of activity, the cooperative is struggling to keep up with the increased growing administrative burdens and complexity of operations. We chose this coop due to its uniqueness: founded by a retailer (a rare situation across Europe) in a climate dominated by farmers' lack of interest to associate given the communist "collectivization" experience but also failed recent attempts, and due to its urgent need for advisory services. Our LL focuses on practical results by targeting the strengthening of financial and marketing capabilities within the cooperative and to draw out learnings for the development of future innovation-supporting advisory services across Europe.

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COUNTRY/REGION:

Romania

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KEY WORDS:

#living lab, #advisory system for cooperative support, #multi-stakeholder, #participatory process, #financial, #co-creation

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Our Living Lab approach was build on a multi-stakeholder participatory process that created a practical solution to a very important problem of the cooperative: lack of advice on financial and tax issues. The co-creative strategy was based on a few highly interactive sessions between farmers and experts which brought a lot of value to the cooperative members. On November 28 - 29th 2018 Highclere Consulting Team and a financial consultant, organized two Living Lab sessions with 32 members of the Cooperativa Agricolă Carrefour Vărăști in Giurgiu county. Together they developed an entirely new and innovative advisory document for small-scale vegetable growers which had not existed before. The event was the culmination of several months of preparatory work with the local community of smallholders and their cooperative leaders that began in the spring of 2018 with the clear identification of a pressing need for tailored fiscal advice in an accessible and easy-to-use format.

More than 90% of the cooperative members who participated in the Lab felt they had learned something new, two thirds felt more confident about increasing their fiscal transparency and paying their taxes according to the new laws, and one fifth of them expressed an increased willingness to pay for professional advisers in the future. Details and info about these can be found [here](#).



ABOUT AGRILINK

AgriLink is a multi-actor project funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme. It brings together 16 partners from 13 countries, including universities, applied research institutes, advisors and consultants from public organisations, private SMEs, a farmer-based organisation and specialists in communication and distance learning.

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This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 727577.

All the Practice Abstracts prepared by the AgriLink project in the EIP-AGRI common format can be found here: <https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/en/find-connect/projects/agrilink-agricultural-knowledge-linking-farmers>