



PRACTICE ABSTRACT NR. 8

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Problem solving in living lab: Improving innovation support to sustainable soil management in maize cultivation

In the joint Dutch and Belgian living lab advisors, farmers, contractors and researchers are working together to develop improved innovation support to sustainable maize and soil management. The living lab is organised as a collective experimentation and learning process between the different stakeholders. Within the living lab several experiments are undertaken to develop tools and procedures to support more sustainable maize production.

During the initial empathise phase the stakeholders were invited to share their view on the challenges in maize production. Increasing the stakeholders' awareness of the potential benefits of improved soil management and changing the focus from one on short term quantity production objectives to a more long term focus on quality of feed production seem to be the main challenges for innovation support. In the define phase the most urgent and promising innovation support tools were identified. This resulted in the following agenda for the living lab in 2018/2019 in the Netherlands:

- 1) Catch crop decision tree: to support the development of a practical guide and a decision support tree for the implementation of catch crops in maize production.
- 2) Nitrate tour: to develop a procedure for farmers to assess the water quality on their own farm, thus providing insight in their impact on the water quality.
- 3) Kitchen Table Talk: to develop guiding principles for Kitchen table conversation between a farmer, a contractor and an advisor to plan and organise soil management activities in maize production.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Each topic in the Living lab will lead to practical tools or a tested procedure for innovation support to be used by one or more of the stakeholder groups in the lab. The tools and procedures are further developed and tested by the participants of the living lab in collaboration with other projects and institutions working on the same topic. In second instance the Belgium stakeholders are invited to assess the relevance and effectiveness of these tools or procedures in the Belgian context. This provides insight in the possibilities and transformation needed for applying these innovation support tools in different contexts.

The active and meaningful involvement of farmers and advisors in the development of the tools and procedures requires much attention. Though they themselves identified the need for these tools, developing them in close collaboration with others in a living lab setting is not always an obvious step. This endeavour sheds valuable light on the influence of particular interests of different stakeholders on the content and focus of the innovation support provided to farmers. Furthermore the experiences in the lab will provide insights how to use the living lab concept when working with private parties on an endeavour of public interest.



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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