



PRACTICE ABSTRACT NR. 88

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Encouraging and motivating small farmers to participate in group discussions

The biggest challenge of the [Living Lab \(LL\)](#) in Romania was building a trustful relationship with the stakeholders, especially with small farmers. Giurgiu County has suffered a strong process of “collectivization” imposed by the communist regime for about 50 years (see PA9). 30 years after the revolution, farmers are still cautious about what implies their properties or committing them as a group. For years, families commercialized their vegetables individually to the free markets in Bucharest. Approached by many middlemen coming in the area (retaining most of the value from transactions), the Vărăști producers took the risk of selling their products to Carrefour through one of them. One day, the middleman didn't turn up anymore, owing money to the producers, and products to the retailer. It was a “cold lesson” of accessing the market together. Not a very inspiring one. Interested in local products, Carrefour representatives approached the Vărăști group directly, gradually becoming an indirect advisor, supporting them in setting up the cooperative, a packhouse and the production plan. They were officially on the market! When we initiated the LL, the cooperative was expanding. However, we've learnt that the success of the cooperative brought financial complications for its members. They didn't know about the carried fiscal and financial implications. It took couple of meetings to have the farmers opening up and confessing their problems with the fiscal administration, blocked bank accounts or the cashflow disruption at household level. Listening to each other and sharing, helped them to come together as a community, and us to understand better the LL's focus towards a practical solution to a real and acute need of the small farmers.

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COUNTRY/REGION:

Romania

KEY WORDS:

#livinglab, #co-creation,
#cooperation, #creativity,
#structure

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The most important lessons that we can share from this experience are the **access to clear information** and **association and involvement**.

Small farms require clear information, delivered in simple language, as well as the possibility to discuss questions with advisers without the fear of being penalized for asking questions regarding the challenges they face.

Organized in cooperatives, small farmers can be more easily involved in innovative advisory services, and once they sense the usefulness of the information received, they also become willing to pay for these services.



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.

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