HORIZON 2020

European Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) towards innovation-driven research in Smart Farming Technology

Results in Brief

From innovative idea to practical application: getting smart farming technologies into the field

The EU-supported Smart-AKIS thematic network presents farmers, advisors, researchers, entrepreneurs, innovation brokers, and others interested in the subject, with what new technological developments are rolling out.

FOOD AND NATURAL RESOURCES

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From commercial smart farming technologies (SFT) that can be harnessed now, to innovative ideas that will shape the future, the Smart-AKIS project wanted to let those who could benefit from the application of new technologies to their farming practices, know what's out there.

Project coordinator Professor Spyros Fountas explains, "We want to help farming in Europe become more productive and, at the same time, more sustainable."

To bring this about, the project set up an online platform that offers researchers and companies involved in the project, the chance to share scientific articles, commercial

products and research projects. These are all accessible through a user-friendly search engine exploiting key words such as crop-type, field size and so on. “We wanted to make sure the latest knowledge at commercial and scientific levels could be accessed by farmers and other interested parties,” says Prof Fountas.

The e-platform that is Smart-AKIS was established in collaboration with experts from the agricultural European Innovation Partnership (EIP). “We were delighted to have them on board as it enabled us to be integrated into the common EIP-Agri standards. Ninety of our practice abstracts, (short clear texts directed at farmers and other end users of smart technologies), are now available on the
EIP-Agri platform.”

But the project’s activities were not just online. They brought together people at three regional innovation workshops in seven countries (Spain, France, the Netherlands, Germany, UK, Serbia, Greece) and held two transnational innovation workshops.

“We hosted these in Spain and in Serbia with the aim of removing the barriers that hold back the adoption of existing smart farming technologies (SFTs). We wanted to generate new project ideas at both national and cross-border level, to improve or redesign the implementation of SFTs,” Prof Fountas says.

To get an idea of how that implementation is going on the ground, the project conducted an EU-wide survey involving almost 300 farmers, and a parallel survey of 25 experts, on the subject of SFT. “We felt direct contact would add a vital element to our understanding, so we also carried out personal interviews to give us an idea of the status quo of SFT integration in Europe, and the reasons why farmers decide to adopt technology or not.”

The survey of both potential end-users and developers enabled the project to analyse the socio-economic aspects that influence innovation evolution in the SFT sector.

It was a challenging project, involving multiple stakeholders, a variety of platforms and several large conferences. Despite that Prof Fountas is very clear that all the effort paid off, “We believe that Smart-AKIS was very successful in mobilising people around the EU, raising awareness of the fact that SFT is not as popular as it should be. But we found that it is a question of motivation and that motivation stems from knowledge of what is out there. Which is why I think we have achieved what we set out to do.”

Certainly, there is an appetite for more information. Their events were crowded, showing the level of interest in the subject. Prof Fountas believes they generated a lot of interesting discussion and brought different actors together, sometimes for the first time.

“Our recommendations are also very interesting for policy makers in Brussels and in national countries. The ideas the project generated can help to drive research and innovation in this field, for the benefit of EU agriculture as a whole.”

Keywords

Smart-AKIS | smart farming technologies | precision farming | EIP-Agri | European Innovation Partnership | web platform

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