SAGRI

Policy briefs

SAGRI: an EU-funded Project which aims to increase the sustainability of the European agriculture.

SAGRI - "Skills Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture" - is a project financed by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Commission which can assist to improve all farming systems and to promote the conversion of intensive conventional farming to organic farming - having the potential to be locally sustainable. Whether they are in practice depends on farmers' actions to adopt the appropriate technology in the specific agro-ecological environment. Through institutions of suitable concerted and standardized study curricula, specialized into the most recent developments of science and technology, the SAGRI Project aims to increase the technological level for farmers, agricultural workers and extension staff, so that they will become even more employable. In particular, this will be achieved thanks to an enhanced mobility across EU countries, since their own competences will be recognized under the framework of the SAGRI system, which will provide official and recognized certifications regarding this issue.

Better knowledge, competence and skills for the EU farmers for a sustainable agriculture.

A critical issue in the 21st century are the changes and adaptations required in agricultural education in order for it to more effectively contribute to the improvement of sustainable agricultural production and rural development. Poor training of agricultural extension staff has been identified as a part of the problem of the relative ineffectiveness of much of extension in the field. This applies not only to the extension staff, but also to agricultural professionals in general. Unfortunately, training of human resources in agriculture is often not a priority in countries' development plans. A recent survey conducted for European Commission revealed that the majority of the farmers in Europe have received only secondary education (57%), while 16% of the farmers had post-secondary (non-tertiary) education, 12% had tertiary education and 15% had only primary education. Only 17 % of farmers finished basic or full training in agriculture-related disciplines. The SAGRI Project is aimed to give a decisive answer to the request of better trained farmers, agricultural workers and extension staff, thanks to structuring specific courses aimed to increase their knowledge, competence and skills in the field of agro-environmental technology for sustainable agriculture, i.e.: "Sustainable Agriculture".

Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

“Sustainable agriculture”, a way for exploiting primary production in Europe.

In the EU almost 50% of the territory is covered by farmland (both arable and permanent grassland), which means that agriculture plays a key role in land management and has a huge responsibility in the preservation of natural resources. In order to practice a sustainable agriculture, farmers responsible for the management of farmland must adopt correct and environmentally friendly practices, using appropriate technology and complying with relevant EU regulations. Recent developments in science and technology, that could be an added value for farmers’ crop and land management, are still unutilized in many situations, since farmers have not been introduced to them or have not been trained to use them. “Sustainable agriculture” means therefore an integrated system of plant and animal production practices aimed to:

- Satisfy human food and fiber needs.
- Enhance environmental quality and the natural resource base for agricultural activities.
- Make an efficient use of non-renewable and on-farm resources.
- Sustain the economic viability of farm operations.
- Enhance the quality of life for farmers and society as a whole.

Structuring the SAGRI courses and relevant Learning Outcomes: a cross-linking approach.

The contents and relevant Learning Outcomes of the SAGRI courses are the result of a cross-linking approach connecting the expectations coming from the primary sector – through the farmers associations which are participating into this Project. The whole issue, is based on the awareness of farmers, agricultural workers and extension staff in terms of green and digital/technological skills, once intersected with the most recent developments in science and technology - detected and focused on by the Universities belonging to the SAGRI Partnership Consortium. They concern:

- Green skills. Skilled agricultural workers increasingly need to have a holistic awareness of sustainability, i.e.: understanding climate changing, the need for carbon emission reduction, renewable energy, biomass valorisation and biofuels, water resources and ecosystems management, integrated pest management, as updated with new regulations and legislation.
- Digital or technological skills. Skilled agricultural workers will need to be able to understand and apply new technologies related to: primary production for both food and non-food uses, soil science, crop and livestock genetics, agri-chemicals, precision technology and general purpose technologies such as remote sensors, satellites and robotics.

General factors and transversal skills for the SAGRI courses.

- Technology itself is not sufficient and a well-trained team is also required. Investing solely in technology will not ensure successful implementation of ICT applications; it is necessary to invest in a team that can effectively perform tasks, as well as to invest in capacity development of the end users who can ensure the sustainability of the project.
- Complex ICT or complex platforms are not necessarily essential: technologies already being used by farmers should be taken into consideration.
- Contextual factors: local factors such as the lack of adequate resources must be taken into account beforehand (e.g. electricity, gender issues, limited network coverage and low bandwidth, local languages). Implementation approaches need to identify the specific needs of the intended users by working in collaboration with them. There is not one single solution that fits all projects: context, policies, marketing efforts and incentives are all essential factors to ensure participation from community members.
- Data integrity and security must be ensured throughout the project and when using ICT applications. Experts agreed that leveraging location data and other metadata with individual records helps to maintain integrity.
- Agricultural workers and farmers should have a minimum education level of high school and a basic knowledge and experience in agriculture, at a practical level.

Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union