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3.1 AKIS Academy: an holistic approach to professional development of the advisors

Rationale

All advisors must be integrated within AKIS in an inclusive way, to be able to cover the economic, environmental and social dimensions and provide up-to-date technological and scientific information developed by R&I (art. 15 Reg. EU 2021/2115). In fact, The role of agricultural advisors within AKIS is extremely important, as they are one of the main sources of information for farmers' decision-making and they can act as innovation support services.

In this view, Managing Authorities through their AKIS Strategies of the CAP SP 2023-2027, have the opportunity to fund a variety of interventions that can be appropriately defined, combined and well-tailored to address the specific needs of local advisors and innovation support services providers for professional development. On this regards, over the last years, there have been outbreaking advancements in defining new and innovative vocational trainings that, by benefitting from the most recent research on interactive innovation models, help the acquisition of soft skills and functional capacities which are fundamental to support those multiactor processes and the functioning of the AKISs.

During the programming period 2014-2020, the need for strengthening the competencies and skills of advisors on AKIS and interactive innovation processes, to allow them contributing to reinforce the AKIS, fostering and facilitating knowledge flows between research and practice and the multiactor innovation projects (EIP-Agri OG), was arisen by regional programme partnership of the RDP 2014-2020 in Veneto Region.



Keywords

Peer-to-peer learning, training, interactive innovation, Operational Groups, advisor's Groups,



Potential users

Advisors and advisory organizations, Managing authorities of the CAP strategic Plans, Vocational training bodies



Country

Italy: Veneto Region

Training and knowledge exchange



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Particularly,, in this context, where there's a wide representation of the plurality of the local AKIS actors, it was decided to boost the professional development of the advisory services by combining the updating of the technical skills and competencies, towards a better alignment to regional CAP objectives, with the acquisition of functional capacities, oriented to help the sharing of knowledge and innovations and strengthening of the relations within the AKIS.

In this view, the MA delegated Veneto Agricoltura (box 1) to design and realize some vocational training. This is regional Agency for innovation in agriculture, an in-house body of Region Veneto.

Solution

One of the vocational training designed by Veneto Agricoltura to apply its mandate is the "AKIS academy course", which goal is to support strengthening the local AKIS, through increasing the capacities and skills of local advisors in facilitating knowledge flows and innovation processes (e.g. OGs) (table 1).

Box 1: Veneto Agricoltura: the regional Agency for innovation in agriculture

Veneto Agricoltura is the Veneto Region's Agency for Innovation in the Primary Sector, supporting the Regional Committee in the development of policies concerning farming, agro-food, forestry and fisheries sectors. The Agency deals with applied research carrying out experimental trials aimed at testing and disseminating technological, organizational, process and product innovation both to improve competitiveness of farms and productive chains and to promote environmental sustainability. To this end it sometimes avails itself of the cooperation of private producers. The safeguarding and protection of animal and plant biodiversity of agricultural, naturalistic and fishing interest, as well as the management of the region's state owned forests are among the goals pursued by the Agency. Testing and demonstrative activities are carried out within European, national and regional projects. Veneto Agricoltura is accredited for continuing vocational training under the regional law and it is certified by ISO 9001 for its training activities.

For more information <https://www.venetoagricoltura.org/>

Table 1: General overview on the AKIS Academy Course

Playing innovation: policies and initiatives	Disseminating innovations: Professionalism, methods and tools	Playing participatory innovation: experiences in Veneto, Italy and Europe
AGRI Start up day: Introduction to the course	Advisory beyond advisory: approaches, methods and tools Planning advisory services	Playing collaborative innovation: methodologies and experiences
Public policies and farm management strategies for innovation	The advisor and peers Communication advisor-farmer	
The role of advisors in European projects	The contribution for training to innovation processes	Experiences of innovation (focus): in Veneto
Strengthening the AKIS in Veneto	Innovation by training: communicating and disseminating innovations Managing dissemination on filed and demofarm events	Experiences of innovation (focus): in Italy
Agristage abroad	The advisor as a teacher The advisor as writer Old and new social media tools for innovation dissemination	Experiences of innovation (focus): in Europe

In practice...

The duration of this course is about 150 hours. It is realized across years 2023-2024 and it is funded under the framework of M2 of the RDP 2014-2020 of Veneto Region, since it is still on going.

In fact, AKIS Academy embraces an holistic approach to professional development, through including a mix of methods (in presence, remote, on field, stage abroad), contents and meetings with relevant actors.

The target groups of this course are the advisors who operate or intend to work in the field of farm advisory services in the primary sector and priority access is given to the ones already operating under M2 of the RDP 2014-2023. The course is organized in collaboration with the regional board of the professional order of agronomists and foresters, so that participants get credits that are valid for the required life long learning.

The delivery of the training benefits from the inclusion of a pull of AKIS experts that includes representatives of the national professional board of agronomists and foresters, researchers, policy makers, innovation support services and partners of OGs.

The release of a certificate of attendance is foreseen under the condition of a completion having successfully passed the learning test successful learning test. The learning test consists of a series of multiple-choice questions. It is considered passed upon obtaining at least 60% of the correct answers. Among the others, the AKIS academy course includes a specific module on “Playing collaborative innovation: methodologies and experiences” that was realized by some trainers of trainers (ToT) of the i2connect H2020 project (box 2).

Box 2: Interconnecting the CAP SP with i2connect H2020 project

Training of trainers “Playing collaborative innovation: methodologies and experiences”

One of the modules of AKIS Academy course is a training of trainers entitled "Playing collaborative innovation: methodologies and experiences" which is specifically designed for innovation support services under i2connect H2020 project. This module covers topics related to the conceptualization and support to the implementation of interactive innovation models, through the use of some methods and tools that are designed to be applied along the different stages of their development .

The module was carried out by 4 trainers of i2connect H2020 project and involved 20 local trainers of trainers, that were selected by Veneto Agricoltura on the basis of their current participation in collaborative innovation processes and their strong interconnections within AKIS, such that they have the abilities, in in turn, to act as trainers of other advisors.

The module lasted 16 hours in-presence and was characterized by the full involvement of the participants, through experiential, proactiveness and co-production of the lessons learnt. Participation was free of charge and a certificate of attendance was issued after compulsory attendance of at least 85% of the scheduled training hours, as well as after successfully passing the learning test.

For more information: <https://www.venetoagricoltura.org/evento/cosa-vuol-dire-fare-innovazione-collaborativa-metodologie-ed-esperienze/>

Practical implications for replicability

The learning agenda of AKIS Academy can be replicated without any particular burden. However, some implications have to be considered:

- Interconnections with i2connect H2020 project and presence of trainers of trainers are prerequisites for the inclusion of the specific training module on “Playing collaborative innovation: methodologies and experiences”.
- Interconnections with the CAP and other networks (e.g. modernAKIS) are helpful for the organization of study visits and stages abroad.
- The inclusion of stages and study visits implies the allocation of an adequate budget to cover travel and accommodation of the participants.
- The inclusion of incentives for advisors to participate (e.g. credits, priorities/premialties in case of accessing the CAP SP).

Benefits

- Synergies with other initiatives (H2020 project) that brought to enlarging the training offer of the Region under the CAP SP with new topics, methods and tools.
- The holistic and practice-based approach of this course help advisors acquiring competencies and capacities along with strengthening interconnections within the AKIS
- The inclusion of stages and stud visits across Italy and Europe enable the advisors engaging in peer-to-peer learning exercises and comparison of own experiences with other situations.
- Enhancing competencies on innovation processes and functional capacities for their support.
- Enlarging the network of the local advisors by promoting their interconnections at national and European level.

Watch this AKIS-in-Practice!



Further information

- <https://psrveneto.it/misure/misura-1-trasferimento-di-conoscenze-e-azioni-dinformazione/>
- <https://www.venetoagricoltura.org/evento/akis-startup-day/>
- <https://venetorurale.it/sviluppo-rurale-veneto-2023-2027/>
- <https://www.regione.veneto.it/web/agricoltura-e-foreste/sviluppo-rurale-2020>
- <http://www.pianetapsr.it/flex/cm/pages/ServeBLOB.php/L/IT/IDPagina/2952>

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