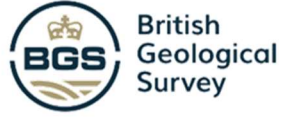


Farm PEP



On-farm trials facilitation tips

What are on-farm trials, and why should you consider participating or organising one?

On-farm trials are a practical research method taking place in real life conditions and where the farmer's needs and perspectives are at the heart of the process; different actors bring their know-how, resources, and perspectives to explore a specific challenge and find solutions. This model has many advantages!

Explore challenges and solutions in real life conditions

On-farm trials explore farmers' challenges in real life conditions. The focus is on farmers' problems to be solved; and farmers' input, physical space and everyday practices are essential to explore answers and identify the best options. Their practical experience is also essential to identify useful and implementable solutions, weeding out the ones that are not likely to be used in real life.

Derisk innovation and find customised solutions

By testing ideas across fields or farms with minor conditions variations risk is spread and the same idea can be tested many times in one season. Once the trials are over, participants can compare the results of these slightly different approaches or conditions and opt for the one best suited to each user's reality -rather than the traditional "one-size fits all" approach.

Leveraging a wide array of perspectives, know-how and resources

This kind of research brings together different actors -farmers, researchers, advisors amongst others- with varied perspectives, knowledge, and resources to support finding practical solutions to complex problems.

Different learning tools mean better engagement across the board

On field trials you can learn by listening to ideas, talking about solutions, seeing them in action or testing them directly; regardless of your learning style, there will be something for you! In addition, the social aspect of learning means there are better chances for engagement and for the solutions to be shared and implemented!

Create trust and long-term relations

Outside support when you are testing new ideas is critical to continue even when things are not looking good. This kind of research connects like-minded people, strengthening links and ensuring support.

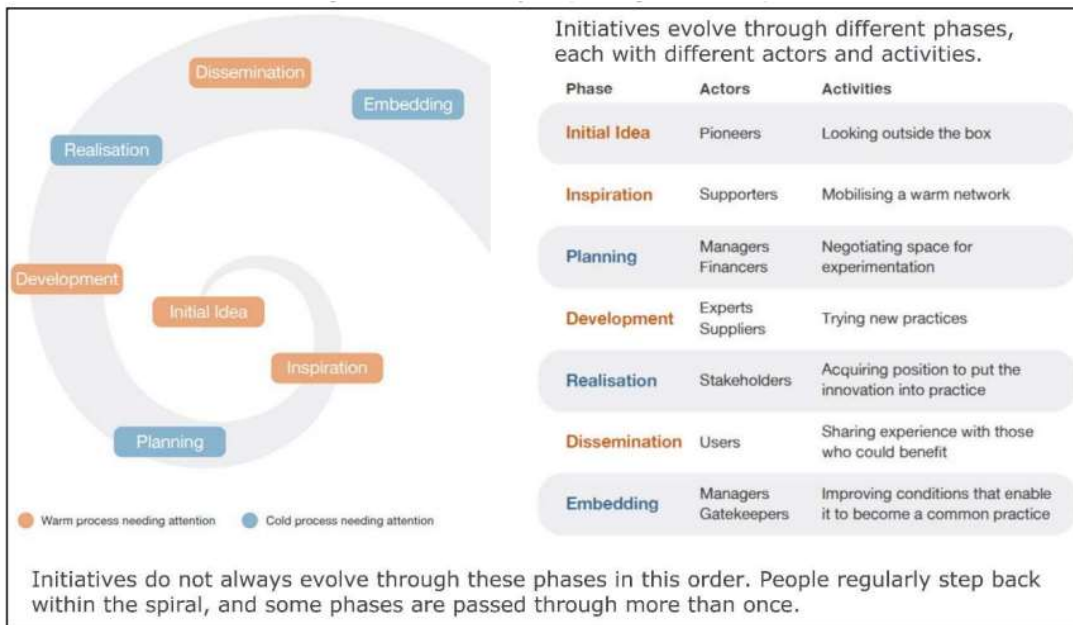
Co-creative processes and the Spiral of innovation

Innovation processes are all about the use, application and transformation of knowledge and resources in the solution of practical problems.

Older approaches had a top-down, linear model - where knowledge is created by researchers, implemented by users not involved in the creative process, and marketed to third parties.

Co-creative innovation challenges it; instead, they are **iterative processes where participants cooperate, share knowledge and resources**. It focuses on **user needs**, helping farmers explore practical solutions to their challenges, derisking innovation uptake by testing it in real conditions and improving resilience.

The *Spiral of Initiatives* model articulates this process in seven non-linear steps through which knowledge, resources, interactions, and communication flow between the actors to find innovative solutions; feedback loops are crucial. Participants come together at each stage to cooperate, negotiate, mediate, and share knowledge and resources. Through it knowledge/resources are combined in new ways or new knowledge is created; and solutions tend to be well adapted and easier to apply by “cross-fertilizing ideas between actors, co-creation and generation of co-ownership” (European Commission 2017)



Spiral of Initiatives model (Innovation Spiral (Wielinga et al, 2008)

Want to learn more about the *Spiral of innovation*?
Explore this this case study ; check i2connect’s **toolbox here**;
or **watch this video!**

Before you start, consider these tips

Focus on real farm priorities

If you explore a challenge that you trial participants need solve, they are more likely to stay engaged for the duration of the trial... and remember, these can last months or even years! Remember: interesting topics that are not always a priority! Having said that, if you can find something that's interesting and a priority, that's a win-win situation.

Research whether there are answers to your challenge are out there!

Sometimes the answers are already available: you just haven't found them yet. Check online or talk to other actors -like neighbours, advisors or even researchers- before starting the process. Some useful online resources: Innovative Farmers, Farm PEP.

Focus on a simple idea... and a simple plan!

Don't try to test too many ideas at the same time; and create a simple testing protocol. Once you get started, life often gets in the way, with stressful times and condition changes. If your trial is hard or confusing to implement, you might end up with the wrong data or, worse, without a trial! A well communicated, clear plan on what the trial will be, what data needs to be collated and potential challenges makes it easier for participants to follow through.



Tools to explore ideas:

- [1-2-4-All](#)
- [Brainstorming](#)
- [The Disney Method](#)

You have an idea! How to plan properly?

Engage a variety of partners who share a common goal

Use your networks to bring the right team to explore your challenge: neighbours, advisors, and expert networks -like IF, ADAS, AHDB, Universities- are potential sources to find practical interested partners with the knowledge, resources and perspectives to find solutions to complex problems. This group will be your trials' "software", where ideas, knowledge, networks and communication reside.

Make sure you have the right "hardware"

You will also need the right hardware to test your solutions and measure the resulting data! It could be having the right field, machinery, tools to assess data, or the right person at the right time. If you cannot access these, you might be incapable to test your idea effectively.

Test for conditions variation before you start

The structural conditions of the spaces you will be working should be assessed before starting. If not identified, the underlying differences can lead to wrong conclusions; for example, if soil conditions or nutrient concentrations are different in a field for example. There are some useful tools you can use to check, like Google Earth or NDVI measurement.

Make sure you can -and do- replicate the trial

Ideally across fields with different conditions and across years. We can only learn so much from one season, and if something's worth doing, it's worth doing across several years.



Tools to explore networks:

- What, who, why, where & how
 - Network analysis
 - Eco-analysis

Tools to align goals

- Speed boat
- Ground rules

Get started!

Respect and plan for pinch times

During the agricultural seasons there are times when work is hectic and participants -especially farmers! - are unlikely to have time to dedicate to the trial; for example, when animals are being born or when sowing or harvesting are taking place. Plan beforehand for these times by having a clear plan and instructions; and support participants in the least intrusive ways during these times using their preferred communication systems- pro tip: know your participants preferred ways communicating really helps! (Emails? Text messages? A call?). Once the high season ends, you can come together to gather and analyse data.

Have designated “process facilitator” to keeps things going.

Someone needs to be responsible for keeping the process going, making sure the necessary information is shared at the right time, sending reminders for actions at key times, consolidating data, sharing information, creating spaces to connect, and maintaining the group going when energy fades. A good facilitator gives participants space while also ensuring things keep moving. They also keep communicating through the process to maintain engagement and bring participants together when the time is right

Tools to facilitate planning the project’s structure, timeline, and roles:

- Actions: identification, proof, phase
- Project Point of Departure
- Assigning levels of responsibilities
- Who/What/When Matrix



Share the knowledge... and start again

Communicate the good and the bad!

Once you've gone through the whole process, turn it into practical advice and communicate its results within the group and across your participants' networks. Even if you "failed", share it! There is a lot to be learnt from when things don't go as planned... You'll get feedback from a variety of perspectives to potentially improve your next round and/or you never know when the next trial is around the corner just because you mentioned it to someone that was interested!

Celebrate together

Finally, celebrate together! Once the trial is over, bring participants together to share the results, but also strengthen the relations you have built and celebrate your hard work. Closing the process officially is an excellent place to plan the next iteration! Which brings us to...

Start again!

If the trial was useful/interesting/enjoyable, you might consider repeating the process to have another season as a point of comparison; or develop a new project. The best time to get started is as you are closing the process to maintain momentum. If it worked, why not give it another try?



Tools to explore the process and share your results:

- [Journey mapping](#)
- On-farm visits
- Webinars
- [Impact stories](#)

Useful websites

- [Innovative farmers website](#)
- [FarmPEP website](#)
- [ADAS website](#)
- [akisconnect.eu](#)

Useful resources

- LIAISON How-to-Guides are a great resource to explore innovation processes stages, and how to make the most of your innovation partnerships and networks:
 - [Coming Together](#): as a group connecting individuals and organisations with complementary skills, knowledge and resources.
 - [Good Planning](#): of co-innovation projects, their structure and work plan.
 - [Healthy Partnerships](#): using tips and tricks for working in a multi-actor-project with shared rules and responsibilities
 - [Connected Partnerships](#): ensuring the embeddedness of co-innovation groups in a wide network of stakeholders with additional expertise and an interest in the project's output.
 - [Achieving Impact](#): complementing this Guide for Evaluation and Impact Assessment with tips and tricks for groups, including good practice examples from the LIAISON team
- [Sessionlab: Library of facilitation techniques](#)
- [LIAISON project: Zenodo repository](#): explore a variety of tools, articles and presentations to “unlock the potential of working in partnership for innovation”.