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Introduction

This document, titled *Agro-biz recommendations* encapsulates all the key themes, issues, points, proposals and recommendations that were raised during the implementation of the four workshops, and the final conference of the FarmsUP! Project. It seeks to communicate the results of the discussions in a clear and coherent manner so as to be easily exploited by farmers and policy makers, namely it serves as the legacy of these encounters between farmers, academics and policy practitioners regarding agro entrepreneurship.

In total, four workshops were delivered in four different areas in the Greek periphery, covering four different topics. More specifically the topics were:

Workshop 1: Education and training in agricultural entrepreneurship

Held in Aliartos, Viotia, on the 17th of May, 2013

Number of participants: 20

Workshop 2: Research and Development in farming practices and the EU Common Agricultural Policy

Held in Kontariotisa, Pieria, on the 6th of June, 2013

Number of participants: 23

Workshop 3: Ways and practices to support agricultural entrepreneurship

Held in Serres, Prefecture of Serres, on the 10th of June 2013

Number of participants: 24

Workshop 4: Branding, marketing and promotion of agricultural products

Held in Skala, Lakonia, on the 7th of July 2013

Number of participants: 25

Following the implementation of the four workshops, the final Conference brought together policy makers, farmers, agro-entrepreneurs, and scholars, engaged in agricultural research to further elaborate and add their perspectives to the question of how to promote agro-entrepreneurship.

The Conference was undoubtedly a great success, based on the high level of expertise and mix of speakers, the attendance record (380 physically present and 605 participated via web-streaming) and media attention.





All participants had the opportunity to take part in practical and effective workshops focusing on the fundamental principles of agro-entrepreneurship, marketing and branding of agricultural products, the development of agro-tourism and the mentoring for women agri-entrepreneurs.

In the following sections, we will present a **digest** of the aforementioned events, looking at the key issues discussed in order to, on the one hand, inform farmers of opportunities, tools and give them advice and on the other, to steer the attention of policy makers to the issues they need to take into consideration.





Workshop 1: Education and training in agricultural entrepreneurship

The aim of this workshop was to inform on education and training in agricultural entrepreneurship. The workshop presented the existing structures and mechanisms that enable farmers to receive education and training and also highlighted the importance of the former in the development of skills and competences of farmers.

In contrast to the often quoted, stereotypical view that farmers are averse to training or education, the workshop discussion revealed that, on the opposite:

- Farmers understand the importance of education and training for agriculture
- Farmers are willing to learn and develop their skills and are very receptive of information regarding training opportunities.

From the outset, there was no confusion regarding how farmers perceive themselves as they all consider themselves entrepreneurs, as they do engage in the production and selling of goods. However, the peculiarities of the profession were also mentioned:

- Farmers, unlike other entrepreneurs, have to face uncertain weather conditions on top of other external factors such as the state of the economy, competition etc. This unpredictable variable is a comparative disadvantage and a problem that needs to be addressed through information and training activities.

Matching information demand and supply on training and education

The discussion pointed out the **gap** between the existing training opportunities and the information that farmers receive. In this direction, **Militos** presented the 22 European projects that the FarmsUP! project promotes and their educational potential for farmers. Dr. **Alexandros Koutsouris**, from the Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Development at the Agricultural University explored and presented all the possible routes for education and training available for farmers.

Farmers stated that most of the times they seek information all alone in order to better themselves, which demonstrates the **lack of systematic training guidance** and of **targeted information** about training that responds to farmers' needs. There are learning opportunities but they do not reach the end user.

How to bridge the gap:

- Establishment of a **Chamber of Agriculture** which will act as the main mechanism to offer information, guidance on agricultural education and training. The lack of such an institution for farmers was considered a main drawback, as it would enable farmers to





have a reference point for information, networking and consolidate an entrepreneurial spirit.

- Most often farmers don't have the time to take in all the information that comes their way or they feel that there is not training suitable for them. Training programs should be developed taking into consideration the learning methods preferred and the needs they address. Hence, a **bottom up, collaborative approach** is helpful in order to provide training that is appealing and has a positive impact.





Workshop 2: Research and Development in farming practices and the EU Common Agricultural Policy

The aim of this second workshop was to demonstrate the importance of research and development for agriculture and how these can be exploited and become drivers of performance and quality of the end products. This was done in the context and in alignment with the European Common Agricultural Policy. The reformed Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) stresses the importance of innovation and research, its impact on quality and broadens up what we mean as a quality product.

It was stressed that:

- Research helps agriculture to face external factors that can endanger production
- The role of research and innovation is pivotal for quality products.

As noted in the workshop, quality is not understood in narrow terms and today quality depends on many factors.

Farmers should be **more informed** about how research and development can enhance their business and the workshop provided **informational and educational resources** that farmers can turn to:

- **Hellenic Agricultural Organization – Demeter**

It provides education material from research findings that farmers can have access to and capitalize on.

- **FarmsUP! databank of projects**

Farmers can find projects that are R&D focused.

The Common Agricultural policy

The objectives, mechanisms and granting schemes of the new CAP were a key theme of the discussions as they constitute the new environment that farmers will operate in.

The discussions focused among others to the following measures:

- **Small Farmers**

CAP measures seek to enhance the position of small farmers. It provides a business start-up aid of up to 15000 euro for each new farm. Also, small farmers can join the **Small Farmers Scheme** and receive aid (lump sum) amounted up to 1250 euro.

- **Innovation and Knowledge**

The reformed CAP places extreme importance on research and innovation, on knowledge transfer and to a bottom up and cooperative approach. The establishment of the **European Innovation Partnership for Agriculture Productivity and Sustainability** comes to reinforce the linking of the farmer with research and to intensify transfer of knowledge. The objective is to “achieve more and better





from less" and to this end, farmers should understand that quantity should go hand in hand with quality and with respect to the environment and food safety.





Workshop 3: Ways and practices to support agricultural entrepreneurship

This workshop focused on the available practices that can assist farmers to run a farming business and to be efficient agro-entrepreneurs.

Militos presented the various European Union supporting mechanisms and the **Deputy Head of the Prefecture of Serres, Ioannis Moisiadis** presented the measures available regionally and welcomed farmers to take advantage of them and engage more with their local authorities. A series of best practices were also presented to show to farmers how they can exploit the assistance and increase the output, quality and scope of their business.

This workshop also confirmed the view from the farmers' side that they are left alone to act with no guidance, in lack of a Chamber of Agriculture and of regular and accessible information. At the same time, contributors in the workshop stressed that there are a number of **supporting measures** and initiatives that farmers do not capitalize on. Once again, a prevalent problem was manifested: **information not reaching the end user**, or inability of the communication message to appeal and convince the farmers.

To solve this **paradox** both sides should be more engaged and more active in supplying and in asking for information and guidance.

- Farmers should start thinking more as entrepreneurs in the sense of chasing up new opportunities; regularly update their skills and knowledge on their business.
- They should make better use of the Internet and the information provided online. There is a lot of material accessible free of charge.
- The provision of consulting services for farmers (**intermediaries-knowledge brokers**) should be cultivated and promoted. Farmers should have a structured and clear plan of what they want to achieve, weigh costs and revenues realistically and have knowledge of their strengths and weaknesses, and the opportunities and threats they are exposed to.





Workshop 4: Branding, marketing and promotion of agricultural products

The workshop focused on transferring knowledge to the farmers regarding the branding and promotion of their products. It prompted them to think beyond the production of quality products to how they are going to actually position them in a competitive market. The benefits of branding and marketing were explored and demonstrated.

It was pointed at the outset that:

- Farmers should think as entrepreneurs and always seek opportunities and new markets.
- The single European market opens up opportunities for farmers to export their products
- **Standardization** and **labeling** of products is essential in order to affirm their quality and their ingredients and to ensure successful exports.

The importance of **branding** and how farmers can give an identity to their products was a key issue.

- **Branding** gives a unique identity to a product; as such consumers not only recognize it but also identify with it which in its turn helps in establishing a loyal customer base that will buy the product again and again.
- Farmers should understand that by **investing on branding**, they invest on loyalty building and as such they can better predict sales and secure income.

Farmers worry that branding increases the cost of production, when they already operate within narrow profit margins, but they should think of the medium to long term effects and not be short sighted.

- Branding leads to strong identification with a product, and as such to loyal customers and more revenue.

The importance of **promotion** was also pinpointed. Farmers like any other entrepreneur should make efforts to promote their products to their target market. Various promotional tools were discussed such as advertising, offers and discounts, showcasing products to various events.

Farmers can be assisted from various educational tools and information which is available and **Militos** gave them examples:

Resources for learning more about branding, labeling and marketing in general:

- FarmsUP! databank of projects: MikroMarkt, ProudFarmer, CICEI, Oeno-MACA





FarmsUP! Conference

The Conference took place on the **15th of October 2013**, in Nafplio city in the Peloponnese. It attracted contributions from experts in the agricultural field, from the policy, academic and agro-business communities. The key innovative element of the Conference, which demonstrated the commitment of the FarmsUP! project partnership to widen up participation and dissemination, was the fact that the Conference was web-streamed and as such gave the opportunity to farmers from Greece and Europe to participate although not physically present. As mentioned in the introduction, almost **1000** people participated, **380** physically present and **605** via web-streaming, which amply demonstrates how the web-streaming positively affected and widened the participation.

Contributions in a Snapshot

Olga Stavropoulou, Managing Director of Militos Emerging Technologies and Services, organizer of the Conference and Lead Partner of FarmsUP!, opened the proceedings. She pointed to the opportunities on offer in Greece and invited farmers to take advantage of them for enhancing local communities and for job creation.

Leonidas Antonakopoulos, Head of the European Parliament Office in Greece and **Argyris Peroulakis, Alternate Head of the Representation Office of the European Commission in Athens**, stressed the importance of the agricultural sector for the economy and presented the measures and the actions implemented by the European Parliament and the European Commission for the enhancement of agro-entrepreneurship. Both of them emphasized the importance of supporting activities such as the innovative FarmsUP! project for agro-entrepreneurship.

Tassos Heividopoulos, Regional Vice Governor of Argolida, presented the actions of the prefecture for the enhancement of the position of the Greek farmer and of the local economy.

Andreas Stefanidis, President of the Greek Young Entrepreneurs talked about how entrepreneurial principles can be adapted and applied to the agricultural production processes and on the importance of extroversion and of collaborative teams.

Dr. Eleni Maloupa, Manager for Crop Production, Demetra (ΕΛ.ΓΟ-ΔΗΜΗΤΡΑ) presented research findings on crop productions and how these can be used in agro-entrepreneurship and improve the production process.





Christos Karampatsos, Commercial Manager of 'Παραγωγή' highlighted how the Greek periphery and the agricultural sector can be an instrument for exiting the crisis, since the agricultural production and exports can function as a lever for growth in Greece.

Thodoris Sdroulias, journalist and Representative of the European Biological Cities Network, shared the images from his many travels depicting farming life and its difficulties in the rural periphery and discussed the ways that farmers can be supported and he also presented the work activities of the European Biological Cities Network.

Dimitris Raftopoulos, Director of the Strategic Management Unit of the Lifelong Learning Research Institute, talked about the need for entrepreneurial skills acquisition and emphasized that aspiring farmers should not hear 'the sirens' of investments with large and fast profits which occasionally appear and turn farmers to wrong decisions and false expectations, and asked them to be more cautionary and to weigh all information carefully.

Alexandra Tsianti, from the Trinity Farm, showed how farmers can improve their production, using practices which are scientifically based and driven. She shared her personal experience on how biodynamic agriculture benefited and assisted her agro-business to grow.

Aggelos Markou, representing Krokos Kozanis S.A, shared the good practice of how an entrepreneurial approach to the production process can lead to a large business with greater production and profit.

Dimitris Georgas, talked about the automation systems that he introduced in his pig farm which minimized the feeding time while assuring accuracy, feeding all animals with the same proportion.

Fragkiskos Karelakos emphasized that farmers should 'listen to their land' and care for it and not consider it just as a means for profit.

Sofie Tvarno, showed us that the Greek farming products are highly respected abroad in Europe and urge farmers to turn to exporting.

As it is evident, the Conference brought together an interesting mix of speakers and gave the opportunity to successful agro-entrepreneurs to share their experiences and be the **living proof** that 'reading the market signs' correctly, innovation, education and good planning pay off.





FarmsUP! Food for Thought: Lessons from the field

The project experience of workshops and the conference ignited constructive discussions and brought to the fore key problems and highlighted proposals regarding the present and future of the agro-entrepreneurship in Greece and not only.

- **'We are entrepreneurs'**

It was clearly shown that farmers identify themselves as entrepreneurs. This implies that they distance themselves from the image of the farmer that does not require any education or training and of farming being a profession of last resort if someone could not find another job.

- **Farming is entrepreneurship and requires a specific set of skills**

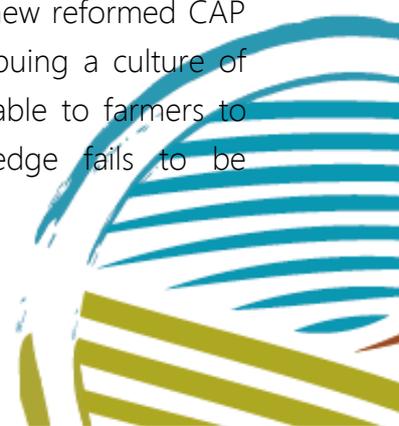
The importance of **Research, Education and Training** was marked. Knowledge, skills development and re-skilling are essential for agro-entrepreneurs as for any other profession. The discussions revealed the **understanding** of farmers regarding the importance of education and training for being efficient and successful entrepreneurs. But, it also revealed that Greek farmers do not come in contact with research findings that could be useful to them or education and training courses. Indicative of the present situation in Greece regarding education and training is the fact that **Greek farming schools** prepare only 250-300 young farmers annually to enter the profession whereas the annual demand for new farmers is at least 6.000. This creates a significant shortage in the provision of training programs that needs to be addressed.

- **Thirst for knowledge**

Farmers don't want to act in isolation, the discussions revealed that they more than welcome exchange of ideas and knowledge, initiatives for collective actions against common problems and for the revitalization of local communities. At the same time, they stress the need for turning rural areas into more attractive and functional living areas.

- **What hinders the dissemination of knowledge**

Knowledge transfer is pivotal for successful agro-entrepreneurship. The new reformed CAP stresses the importance of transfer knowledge mechanisms and for imbuing a culture of lifelong learning and constant seeking of information that can be valuable to farmers to enhance their business. But, discussions demonstrated that knowledge fails to be





disseminated, to reach the end users. What this implies is the lack of the **mediating actors** that can tailor and package information and knowledge and ensure that it reaches its recipient.

- **Lack of a Chamber of Agriculture**

In conjunction to the above point, the lack of a **Chamber for farmers** as an institution that will support them and will act as a reference point was very pronounced and mentioned in all meetings. Farmers do not have their own Chamber and are not allowed to register in their local Chamber and this impedes their efforts to act collectively and have a local organization that will pursue their interests. Such a supporting mechanism could involve the access to information regarding training, funding opportunities, study visits, exports support and other supporting mechanisms. It can function as a driver that keeps farmers alert, informed and consequently more competitive.

- **Farmers and ICT tools**

The workshop and conference proceedings revealed that ICT tools use is at very low levels in rural areas and among the farming population. This implies that farmers are in a **disadvantaged position in the knowledge society** where the use of ICT tools is a prerequisite for being competitive and productive. Farmers should be informed of the benefits of ICT and the multiple functions that they can have. ICT tools notwithstanding ensuring the direct transfer of knowledge can assist farmers in issues ranging from better weather forecasting, monitoring of activities and better production forecasts, to networking, finding markets and promoting their products.

