

What do we mean by collaboration in agriculture?

Carla Gonzalez, Simone Schiller, Sharon Flanigan



Collaboration is a characteristic of human behaviour necessary for the production of goods and services. People act together within a common context to achieve a common objective.

There are different forms of collaboration according to the number of actors involved, the activities undertaken and their intensity, etc.

Collaborations depend on social norms and values, framework conditions and objectives pursued, as well as different formal and informal shapes.

Collaboration in agriculture therefore includes:

- 'vertical cooperation' between agricultural producers and other businesses in sectors up and downstream (e.g. suppliers, processors); and
- 'horizontal cooperation' between agricultural producers (e.g. machinery rings).

Why study collaboration in transitions towards sustainability in agriculture?

- It isn't reasonable that individual farms, or farming systems, attempt to meet all of the demands placed on agricultural systems. These demands should be met at regional level.
- Collaboration is necessary to engage different actors to support and spread the development of innovative 'niche' activities.
- Certain forms of collaboration are considered socio-technical innovations.



Three initiatives on novel forms of collaboration in agriculture

Three case studies of collaboration were undertaken, varying in organizational form, type of actors involved, length of time in existence and motives driving the collaboration:

'CRIE Montado' (CRIE) in Portugal is a small group of agricultural entrepreneurs from Montemor-o-Novo and Alcácer do Sal, set up in 2009, and **promoting the development of multifunctional farms and agriculture through experience and information sharing.**



Machinery rings (MR) were introduced in Scotland in 1987 and provide opportunities for increased efficiency by offering a **low-cost mechanism for resource sharing** (initially **machinery and labour**, but the rings now supply **bulk inputs and training**). This case study was carried out in the Scottish Borders and North East Scotland.

The 'Regionalwert AG' (RWAG) in Germany is a citizen's shareholder corporation and pursues the **provision of shareholder capital to organic agriculture** with the objective of a sustainable regional economy (financial and socio-ecological). It was formally founded in Freiburg in 2006 following a long process of conceptual development at the local level.

More on: <http://www.farmpath.eu/sites/www.farmpath.eu/files/documents/Farmer%20Collaboration.pdf>



Collaboration takes on many different forms throughout the transition process:

>> RWAG and CRIE show that during niche establishment / transitions 'take-off', interpersonal relationships are important to develop a:

- common concept;
- strategy; and
- functioning structure.

>> During a latter phase, the MR shows that formal rules and structures can sometimes "substitute" interpersonal relationships during collaboration processes.

Collaboration with actors outside the initiatives has evolved along with the transitions:

>> Vertical co-operation helped to anchor the niche's proposal into the production chain and regional context in RWAG and MR.

>> Horizontal co-operation is relevant in establishing the niche - denoted in CRIE where members felt the need to currently increase it and delay vertical co-operation.

Leadership is crucial for the success of collaboration in the three initiatives:

>> Lack of persistence in committing to leadership by several members was a critical factor decelerating collaboration in CRIE.

>> Strong leadership was identified as a success factor in RWAG and MR, highlighted through the role of continuity and the personality traits of the leader, including ambition, determination, charisma, interpersonal skills, conviction in the concept and projects.

Clear economic benefits for members were important factors which led to success in MR and RWAG.

In all cases, issues of farm succession and the social sustainability of farming were raised, in particular:

>> Thanks to RWAG, young farmers set up organic farms in Freiburg despite the lack of access to start-up capital through conventional funding schemes (policy and/or financial market).

>> MR provided opportunities for farm successors through being 'supplier members'/ contractors/ service providers to the ring, whilst at the same time working on their own farms when required.

Through collaboration, CRIE reinforced the adoption of environmental approaches in individual projects and introduced an operational model of multifunctionality in the region by extending farm activities beyond agricultural production.

MR helped sustain the economic viability of farms through reduced costs and greater efficiency in accessing agricultural inputs (machinery, labour, commodities, training).

RWAG created a new link between regional shareholders investing in organic farms and other businesses in the regional value chain, strengthening the latter through collaborations such as knowledge transfer mechanisms.

Concluding remarks

>> Supporting collaboration in different shapes at starting phases is uncertain but may have a multiplying effect by increasing the potential of ongoing efforts.

>> Access to land, and to financial start-up capital by young farmers and new entrants, is important for the social sustainability of farming and farm succession.

>> Investing in social capital and collaboration is important for increasing innovation.

For further information see: www.farmpath.eu



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