IPM adoption in my hub

Facilitation approach and progress made in IPM adoption

consulai

My group

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PRESENTATION OF THE HUB COACH ORGANISATION

CONSULAI is a consultancy firm in the agricultural, food, forestry, marine and rural development sectors. CONSULAI works to support investment, manage projects, disseminate results and transfer knowledge. Not only in Portugal, but also in other countries such as Spain and Angola, as well as coordinating and developing international studies and projects.

THE HUB

The Portuguese horticulture hub has 12 members or demo farms, located in the Oeste and Ribatejo regions. The group consists mainly of farm technicians, agronomists and farm managers.

The group is very diverse. Some famers produce only outdoor vegetables, mainly tomatoes, carrots, potatoes, bell peppers and other crops, whilst others produce indoors, mainly tomatoes, lettuce and cucumbers.

OBJECTIVES AND MOTIVATIONS OF THE FARMERS

The main motivation of the group is to exchange knowledge with other farmers and technicians, mainly through demonstration events and interaction with experts. The group seeks to reduce pesticide use, with interest in the topic of soil management (soil health, regeneration and cover crops) and biological control (conservation biocontrol and biodiversity infrastructures).

DRIVERS

There are increasing challenges within agriculture, in particular regarding pest and disease control, the emergence of new threats, the disappearance of alternative chemical controls and climate change.

New alternatives need to be sought, and knowledge constantly acquired in order to meet these challenges.

BARRIERS

The adoption of biological practices, in particular biological control using auxiliaries, is still seen as difficult to adopt in the outdoor sectors. Many do not see it as an effective solution in open environments.
The fact that the group produces very different crops did not allow for the discussion of problems specific to certain pests and crops. This, on the other hand, created a more comprehensive and holistic discussion.

IPM challenges and results

IPM Challenges

What were the main IPM challenges?

As the group was very diverse, each member faced different IPM challenges. However, they mainly related with soil health and lack of knowledge for alternative solutions for pest management and the increased challenges due to climate change and the disappearance of certain active substances.
The main pests discussed in the group were caterpillars, whitefly, mites, and aphid, as well as mildew, alternaria and soil fungi.
The lack of support for decision-making in treatments, specifically lack of DSS available for their IPM challenges was another difficulty faced by the group.

Hub results

What progress has the hub made on these challenges ?

The fact that the group discussed the subject of biological control and the subject of biodiversity structures as support for the conservation of auxiliaries several times has helped to change the mentality of farmers who think of biological control as a solution only for greenhouses.

Regarding soil health, some farmers adopted some alternative practices namely the use of Trichoderma and the use of cover crops to increase soil biodiversity.

What issues still need to be addressed ?

The key topics need further discussion and testing by the farmers in order to validate the practice in different conditions and different crops.
Regarding conservation biocontrol, there are many questions on how to adopt these practices in big plots and its economic impact versus pest reduction.

How are the hub farmers going to proceed ?

The group will continue to discuss their issues and good practices, by getting together in demo events and other meetings.
Many farmers also created relationships and are communicating and sharing knowledge even outside the project meetings.

Key conclusions

The contribution of 'soft skills' to the hub and issue management

Soft skills play a crucial role in the hubs' success, especially in managing issues related to farmer engagement and event effectiveness. Communication skills foster an open, inclusive environment, encouraging farmers to share honest feedback, experiences, and opinions. Active listening allows facilitators to understand farmers' needs better, tailor event topics to their interests, and promptly address concerns. Empathy is key in creating trust, enabling facilitators to navigate different perspectives and resolve conflicts, which promotes a supportive atmosphere. Adaptability also proves essential, as facilitators must adjust agendas based on real-time feedback, enhancing the relevance and impact of each event. Overall, soft skills build a foundation of trust, inclusivity, and responsiveness, essential for successful issue management and impactful, farmer-focussed demonstrations.

Facilitation approaches

Demonstration Events Facilitation

What is the issue the hub work on more precisely?

The core issue is to ensure that farmers have the knowledge and firsthand experience to assess and adopt new practices that might benefit their work, address their specific needs, and improve agricultural productivity or sustainability.

How did you proceed? What did you do?

We engaged farmers actively in the demonstration events by inviting their testimonies, facilitating peer discussions, and organizing reflective sessions at each event's end. By gathering feedback on both the demonstrated strategies and event organization, we could ensure future events addressed farmers' interests and practical needs effectively.

What conclusions can you draw?

Involving farmers directly fosters engagement and a sense of ownership, leading to more meaningful learning.
Consistent feedback collection highlighted areas for improvement, confirming that responsive, farmer-centered approaches make demonstrations more impactful and tailored to their needs.

My tips for making it work

Create an open space for honest dialogue so farmers feel comfortable sharing challenges and successes. Allocate time for peer discussions and reflective sessions to reinforce learning. Regularly gather feedback and adapt future events to it. Flexibility and responsiveness to farmers' interests greatly enhance engagement and event effectiveness.

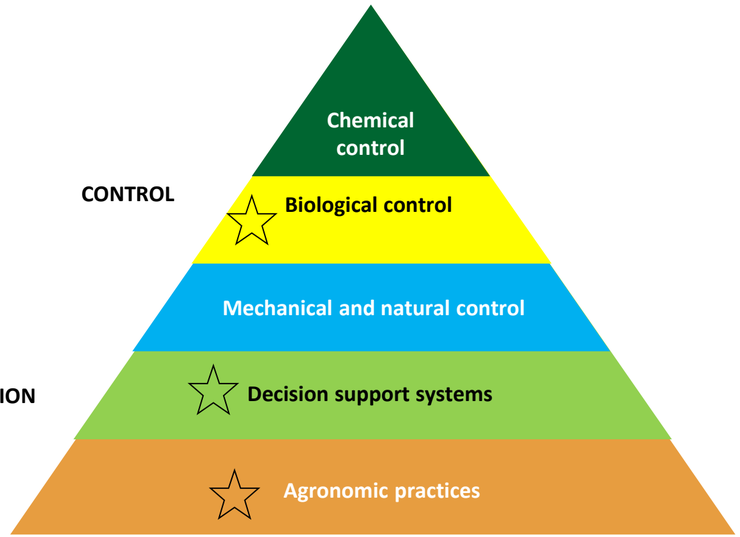
Individual facilitation

Individual facilitation was supported by providing farmers with space to share personal experiences and testimonies. Encouraging individual reflection helps them process what they've learned and relate it directly to their own practices. This approach is essential for building confidence and ensuring that farmers see the demonstration as applicable to their unique contexts.

Collective facilitation

Collective facilitation was achieved through group discussions and dynamic sessions where farmers could share insights and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the demonstrated strategies. This approach helps to harness the collective knowledge of the group, creating a learning environment that benefits from diverse experiences and viewpoints.

IPM adoption & pesticide use



The IPM strategies showcased at the IPMWORKS project demonstration events for the horticulture hub can be positioned within the IPM pyramid. Most of the topics covered fall under the starred themes.

Conservation bio-control was explored, emphasizing the use of beneficial organisms to naturally manage pests. Events covered **decision support systems** that aid in precise pest detection, alongside foundational agronomical practices like **intercropping, cover crops, and crop rotation** to proactively prevent pest outbreaks and support soil health and biodiversity.

> “Even with a lot of daily work throughout the year, the group sought to update themselves on new topics that many of them have heard little or nothing about. IPMWORKS provided an opportunity to learn about new realities and practices and to network among peers.

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> “Even with the challenge of farmers with very different backgrounds and realities (crop, size, profile, etc.), it was possible to create a very fruitful group and events. We opted for broad themes such as soil health and microbiology, DSS and the use of plant structures to conserve aids (conservation bio-control), which worked out very well.

A European network of demonstration farms promoting low pesticide use and economically efficient management strategies

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