IPM adoption in my hub

Facilitation approach and progress made in IPM adoption

My group

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PRESENTATION OF THE HUB COACH ORGANISATION

Inagro vzw. conducts practice-oriented research in function of profitable innovations in West Flanders (Belgium) agriculture and horticulture. We deliver independent advice, tailored to farmers and horticulturists, tested and validated in practice.

THE HUB

The hub consist of 11 West-Flemish farmers. It is a mix of specialized soft fruit growers in substrate in glasshouses/under plastic or in soil under plastic. The main soft fruit they grow are strawberries. Some growers also have raspberries, blueberries and blackberries. Some also produce arable and/or vegetable crops. The main pests they need to manage are thrips, spidermites, white fly, aphids and *Drosophila suzukii.* The main diseases are powdery mildey, grey mold and root rot pathogens.

OBJECTIVES AND MOTIVATIONS OF THE FARMERS

The main objective of the farmers is to improve their IPM-strategy so they can have a sustainable and profitable crop production. They want a limited use of insecticides and fungicides on their product. Further they are eager to learn from each other and exchange knowledge so they can find solutions.

DRIVERS

The hub has a strong willingness to reduce the use of plant protection products and is confronted with the reduction of approved products. They want to exchange ideas with others to make progress. Further they want to optimize their inputs and want to meet commercial demands.

BARRIERS

The hub is confronted with the difficulty to control some pests and diseases because there are technical or economical obstacles. The diversity of cropping systems within the group makes it a challenge to find a common interest. In case of varieties, it is a challenge to meet the market demands.

IPM challenges and results

IPM Challenges

What were the main IPM challenges?

The main IPM challenges were to improve their already advanced IPM-strategy against pests with beneficials, using augmentative biocontrol which is economically justified. Other big challenges are dealing with pests such as *Drosophila suzukii* for which there are no efficient IPM-strategies currently or diseases such as powdery mildew for which good IPM-strategies can't be applied at every farm because of technical incompatibilities.

The hub's results

What progress has the hub made on these challenges ?

A lot of knowledge has been exchanged between the growers and gained on the use of beneficials against aphids. A demonstration on farm at a hub-member has been conducted. The hub members were inspired by several activities at research institutes and growers outside the hub.

What issues still need to be addressed ?

Releasing beneficials needs to be economically justified.

How are the hub farmers going to proceed ?

There is interest to increase the biodiversity on their farm, so less beneficials should be released and they can rely more on natural enemies that are supported by bankerplants.

Key conclusions

Each year, a gathering was convened with all hub members to highlight the objectives for the upcoming year. Every member was acquainted with the year's objectives and had the opportunity to offer suggestions.

This collective commitment led to active participation in various activities and demonstrations. With the guidance of a hub coach, activities and demonstrations were effectively organized, ensuring the fulfillment of the identified objectives.

Facilitation approaches

Reducing the use of insecticides against aphids in strawberries

What is the issue the hub work on more precisely?

Aphids in strawberries were mainly managed by insecticides. However, most insecticides are not compatible with the already used commercial beneficials. Therefore, the growers wanted to use beneficials to manage aphids and so reduce the number of sprayings.

How did you proceed? What did you do?

First, I inspired the farmers with management strategies at Inagro and then conducted an on-farm demonstration with a hub member. Later we also visited a research station where they also use bankerplants. Now hub members are testing bankerplants on their farm.

What conclusions can you draw?

Let farmers be inspired by research and other farmers. So, they can hear, look and learn from each other. Give them the tools so they can easily experiment on their own farm.

My tips for making it work

- Gain trust between your farmers and with you as hub coach
- Listen to the growers and let them decide what they want to do. They are the expert on their farm
- Guide the growers in group and individual
- Give them the tools to make small steps on their farm

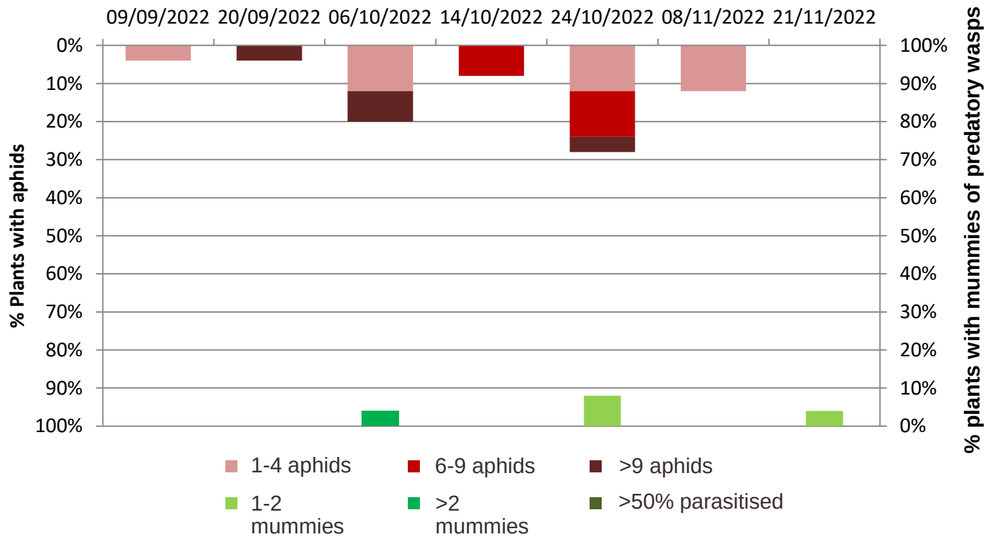
Individual facilitation

On-farm demonstrations were done with commercial beneficials. The growers were individually followed up and were given advice by several experts. In the second phase several growers which test bankerplants are also followed up.

Collective facilitation

To make progress in this IPM-strategy small steps were decided by the group in annual group meetings. In these group meetings farmers gave testimonials and received feedback from the group. Also results from research stations were showed during several field visits so they could see the advantages.

IPM adoption & pesticide use



The above graph shows the presence of aphids in a strawberry crop. Allowing their presence is a first step. It gives a chance to beneficials to settle and manage the aphids. Once the aphid population became too high, corrections with commercial beneficials were succesfully implemented.

"In this group we can openly discuss problems we are facing and looking for IPM-solutions that can work on our farms.

Jolien Claerbout, hub coach

"It is an honour to be part of the group and facilitate them through their IPM-quest. It is inspiring to see how we grew as a group and made steps in several IPM-strategies.

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

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