



6 Simple Steps to Engaging Farm Visits

A guide for how to engage farmers about Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and more, on farm.



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6 Simple Steps to Engaging Farm Visits

With specific examples for engaging audiences about Integrated Pest Management (IPM).

Introduction

To inspire others about implementing innovative and sustainable practices on-farm, it is important to communicate effectively and foster peer-to-peer learning during farm visits and on-farm demonstrations. This 'Six Simple Steps' handbook is a quick guide to how to make on-farm events and visits more engaging and effective, within the context of Integrated Pest Management.

IPMWORKS

The content of this guide is based on research conducted during the H2020 [IPMWORKS project](#) which took place between 2020-2024. The IPMWORKS project gathered 31 partners from 16 European countries, forming an EU-wide farm network demonstrating and promoting cost effective IPM strategies. The project promotes the adoption of IPM strategies through peer-to-peer learning and demonstrating to other farmers that holistic IPM “works”; i.e. allows a low reliance on pesticides with better pest control, reduced costs and enhanced profitability. All resources developed during the project, including case studies and e-learning modules, can be found in the [IPMWORKS Toolbox](#) – a free repository for IPM resources.

— The Case Studies

The case studies used in this document are from the IPMWORKS Hubs; groups of 10-15 farmers implementing IPM practices, that use on-farm demonstrations and farm visits to encourage peer-to-peer learning. The farmers meet regularly on each other's farms to share and learn about the challenges and successes of various IPM strategies. Each group is coordinated by a 'hub coach' – an agricultural advisor responsible for running knowledge exchange events.



The Six Simple Steps



Before getting started, sufficient preparation is key to delivering effective farm visits. Here are some key tips on how to prepare before the big day.

Preparations

- 1 Identify the key information or story you would like to convey**

Having a clear ‘take-away’ message or story decided early on can help you accurately plan your demonstration. For example, how IPM methods are used for a certain pest, how water efficiency has improved over time or your experiences with any recent technology. You will then be able to prioritise what demonstrations and activities need to be prepared for the day and who needs to be involved.
- 2 Consider the audience you are engaging with**

How you communicate technical information will depend on the audience of the day. For example, some people may learn best through practical demonstrations, whereas others may prefer written resources or interactive tasks. Overall, by incorporating a range of engagement methods, seen in the following six steps, and by altering your language choices, you will be able to engage a wide range of people.

Tip: ask your audience to rate their current understanding of the topic at the start of the day.
- 3 Review your own understanding of the topic**

Be prepared to answer unexpected questions about the topic you are demonstrating. You do not need to be the sole expert but draw on the strengths of your team or own sources of information. Be upfront about what you do and do not know. However, it is always good to do some homework beforehand.

To communicate about IPM specifically, it is important to make sure you understand and can communicate the following:

 - The ecology of the location you are showing, such as a field, or other growing environment such as a greenhouse.
 - Options for Integrated Pest Management interventions in that location.
 - Which options are most applicable and desirable to the farm and field context.
 - What is acceptable at the time by the farming industry or community.

Example questions to ask yourself:

What pests and beneficiaries are present?

How would others intervene using IPM?

Which of those methods are most appropriate to their own context?

Is it recommended by a trusted source or peer?

4

Make a plan!

Having a physical copy of your plan for the day helps you to keep track of timings and tick off any areas you planned to cover.

Your plan for the day should include:

- Attendee list
- Time schedule of what you will do
- Locations of each planned activity
- Key topics and messages you need to cover



Start

Introduce the day just as you've prepared, stating the main aim and objectives of the event. Guide the attendees through what you will be covering, why you will be covering the chosen topics, and how it relates to the wider goals of your work area.

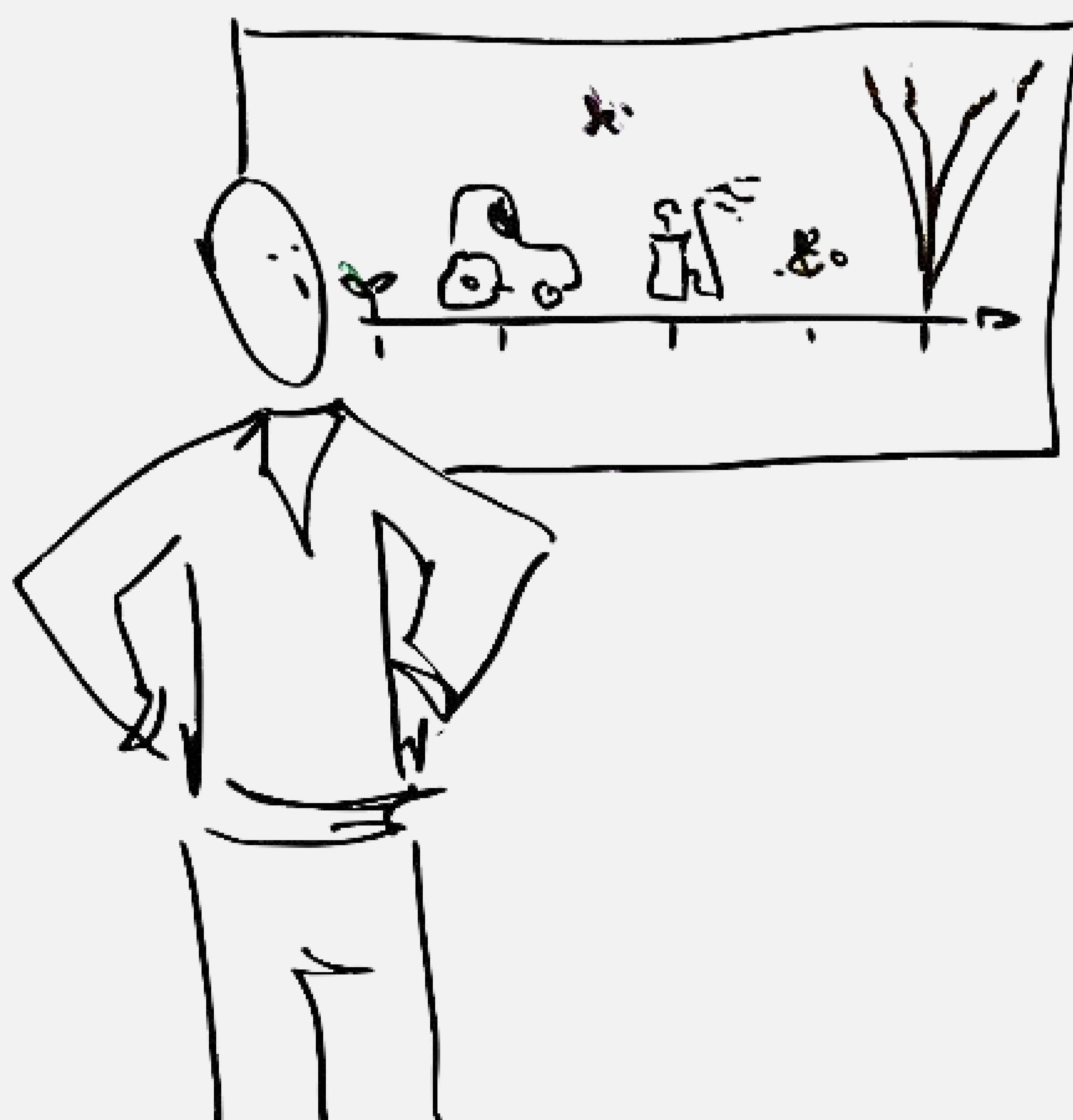
Using a visual activity to introduce a topic before you go into the field to see it in-person can help increase engagement and stimulate more questions.

1

Introduce
the aims and objectives

2

Guide
attendees through the plan
for the day



Case Study 1

Using Banker Plants for pest management

📍 **Farm Location:**
Belgium

👤 **Sector**
Greenhouse



Kit

Question sheet with a diagram of the site which asked attendees: 'Where would you put banker plants for pest control in this green house?', post-it notes and pens.

Action

The host started with a brief explanation on the functioning and purpose of banker plants, a key feature to the greenhouse used to host beneficial insects which predate on pests. The participants then used a poster to identify their ideas of the best place in the greenhouse to put these banker plants. They were encouraged to consider factors such as effectiveness, management logistics and access, and to envision that it was their own site. Farmers then used post it notes and stuck their answers onto the posters.

Outcome

Visitors could see various trials conducted with banker plants. This encouraged analytical thinking on what functions these banker plants could have within the 'landscape' if placed strategically. This simple exercise also showed different options and rationales. Because participants made their preference explicit, an informal debate could begin which highlighted comparisons and thought, rather than being given the answers.



Do

Find a process to demonstrate and allow farmers to get hands-on. Enabling a full sensory experience engaging touch, smell, taste and hearing is typically more memorable than a presentation and sparks practical discussions.

1

Demonstrate
the topic to increase
engagement

2

**Provide sensory
experiences**
to make it more memorable

3

Make it hands-on
to maintain engagement

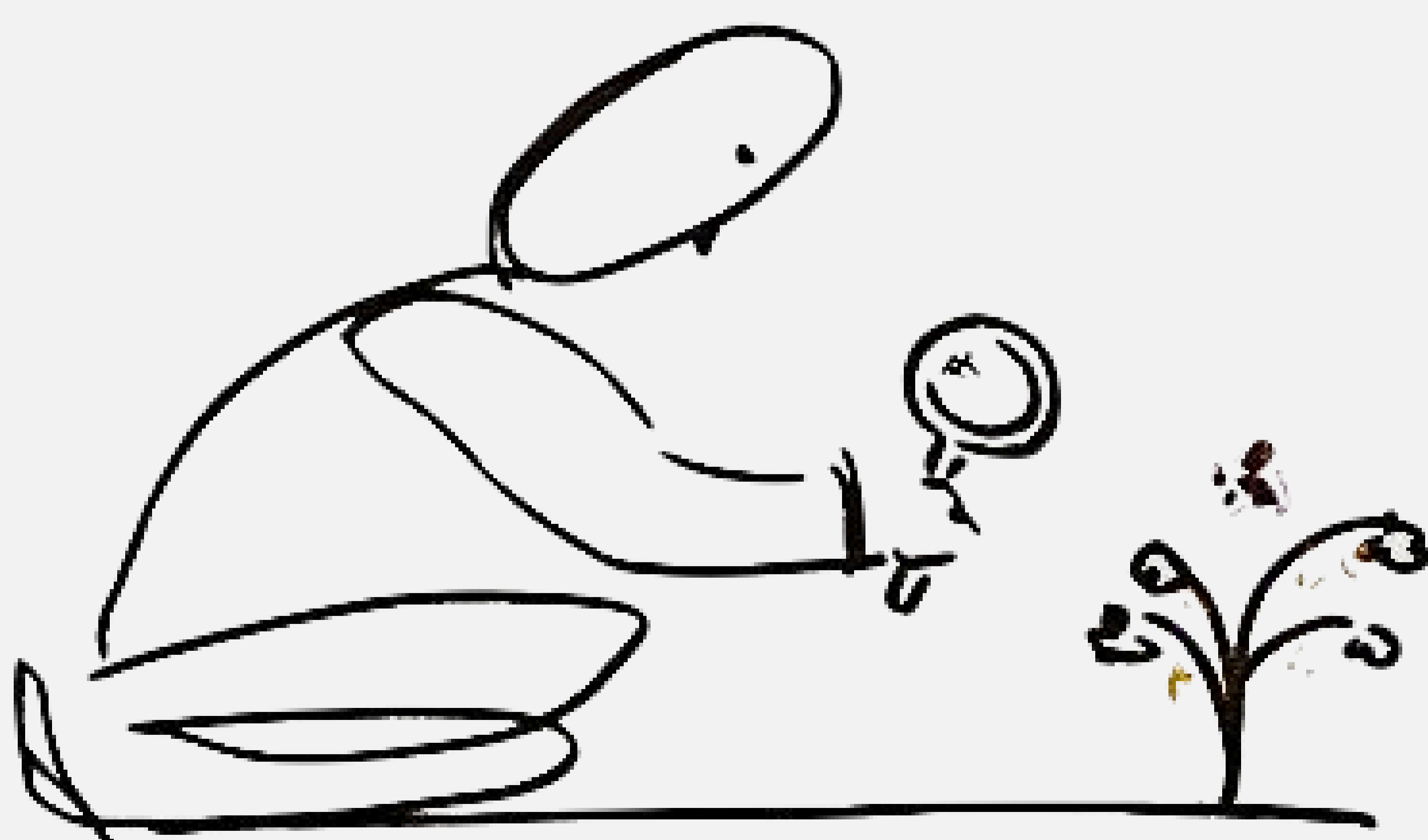
Examples of how you can engage the senses:

Smell the soil

Touch the leaves and roots of
plants

Listen to what wildlife you can hear in
different areas of the farm

Taste the produce
e.g. different crop varieties



Case Study 2

Management and variety options for controlling Potato blight

📍 **Farm Location:**
Netherlands

👤 **Sector**
Field vegetables



Kit

Spade, trial site.

Action

Different potato varieties with different treatments in each plot were dug out with the group, counted and cut open to see their quality.

Outcome

On this field different fertilisation levels, different varieties and the blight-app on Phytophthora treatment were tested on different plots. This monitoring made a comparative evaluation of all strategies possible.

This demonstration was tangible and active and highlighted comparisons between the potatoes and the practices used in the trials. Comparability is crucial. If a practice or innovation is tested, there needs to be a control plot to be able to compare the situations. Many learn better with their hands, eyes, even taste. Creating such an activity holds people's attention, curiosity and debate on what is experienced.



Show

Visualise or schematise data relevant to the demonstration or theme, for example, costs or inputs over time. This helps explain complex processes, show results and data. This can be a poster of images, a graph or diagram, it could even be hand drawn on the day.

1

Visualise
your data to increase impact

2

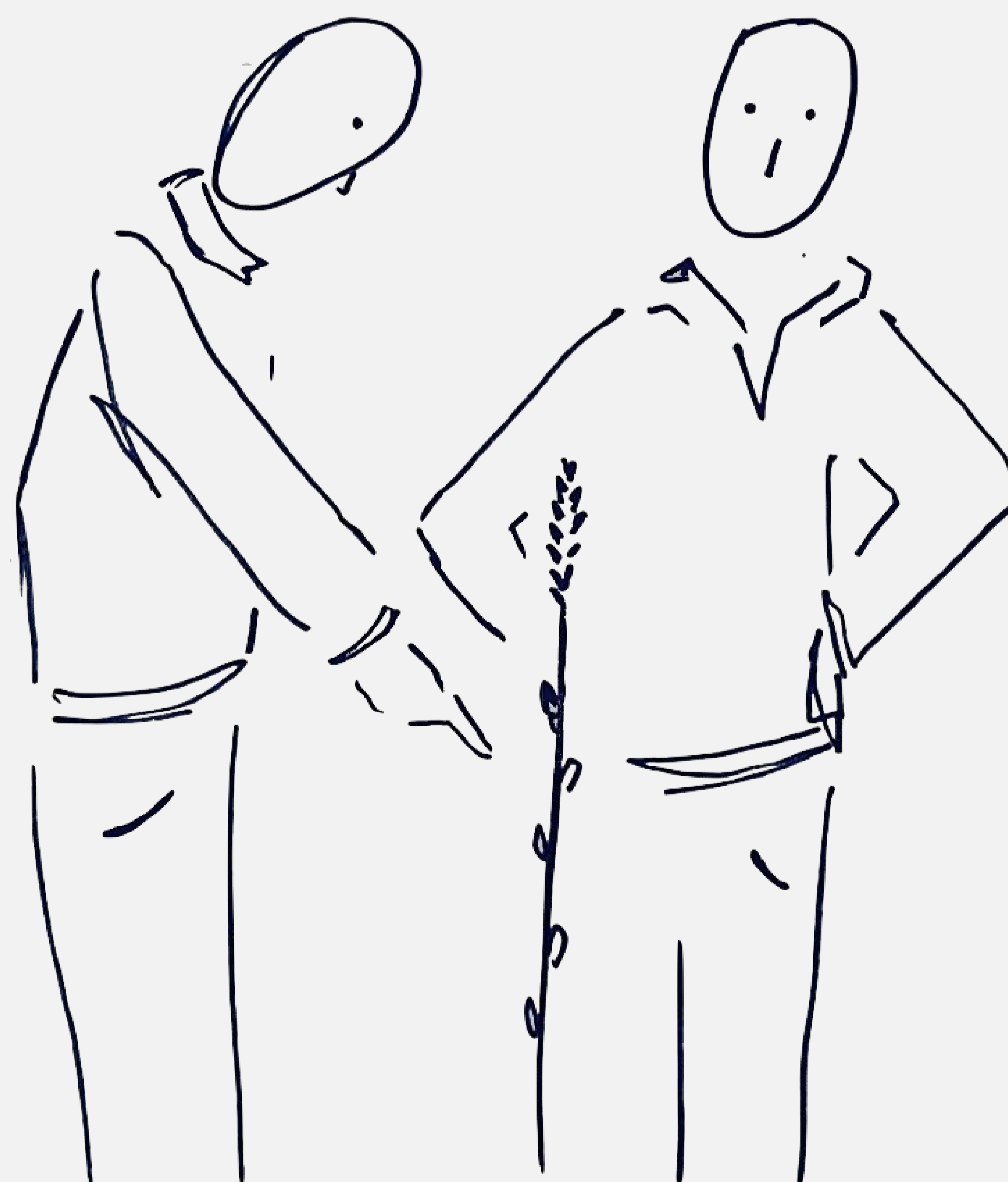
Schematise
the information to make it easier to interpret

Examples of how you can engage the senses:

Pest or beneficial insect samples e.g. insect in clear container

Crop with visible pest or disease damage

Soil sampling kit



Case Study 3

Courgette variety trials

📍 **Farm Location:**
Belgium

👤 **Sector**
Greenhouse



Kit

Printed booklet of results

Action

Each visitor was given a booklet containing trial results with graphs and basic information on the tests conducted. When moving from one plot to another, everyone is directed to the appropriate page in the booklet. The host explained how to interpret the graphs in the booklet with what they were seeing in front of them.

Outcome

Materials such as a booklet, folder or hand-outs can be an important tool when accompanied with good explanations and the opportunity to link the product with the results in data form. In this example, the courgette trials tested different varieties, fertilisation strategies, the use of beneficial insects and measured pollinator activity. The booklet became a guide throughout the visit and reference material that they could take home. Combining a visual aid with a farm walk allowed guests to bring the data to life and be provided with numerical evidence of what they were seeing in front of them.

Case Study 4

Identifying Suzuki fly for soft fruit management

📍 **Farm Location:**
Belgium

👤 **Sector**
Soft fruit



Kit

Insect traps, display dishes, pots or test tubes to hold insect specimens (for example), identification images and a magnifying glass.

Action

The group members were asked to put up insect traps at their farm and bring this to the farm visit. The advisor guided them through how to recognise the Suzuki fly and they had a go. A researcher explained the lifecycle of the fly and how it survives and harms the crops.

Outcome

Farmers understood how crucial recognising the pest is for monitoring and interventions. This set-up really activated practicing, a basic feature of learning and stimulated the sharing of experiences with the pest in focus. Explaining the biological features of the fly and its life cycle stimulated discussion on how to prevent crop damage and how to stop the spreading of the fly by intervening in different stadia of its life cycle. Recognising and monitoring the pest are essential to know which intervention has to be taken.



Talk

Be sure to **explain and clarify** what is shared and allow visitors to ask questions throughout. Even pose some questions to the audience. In addition, it may be worth involving the person or team that carried out the field work or trial. This additional speaker may then answer questions in more detail to the group.

1

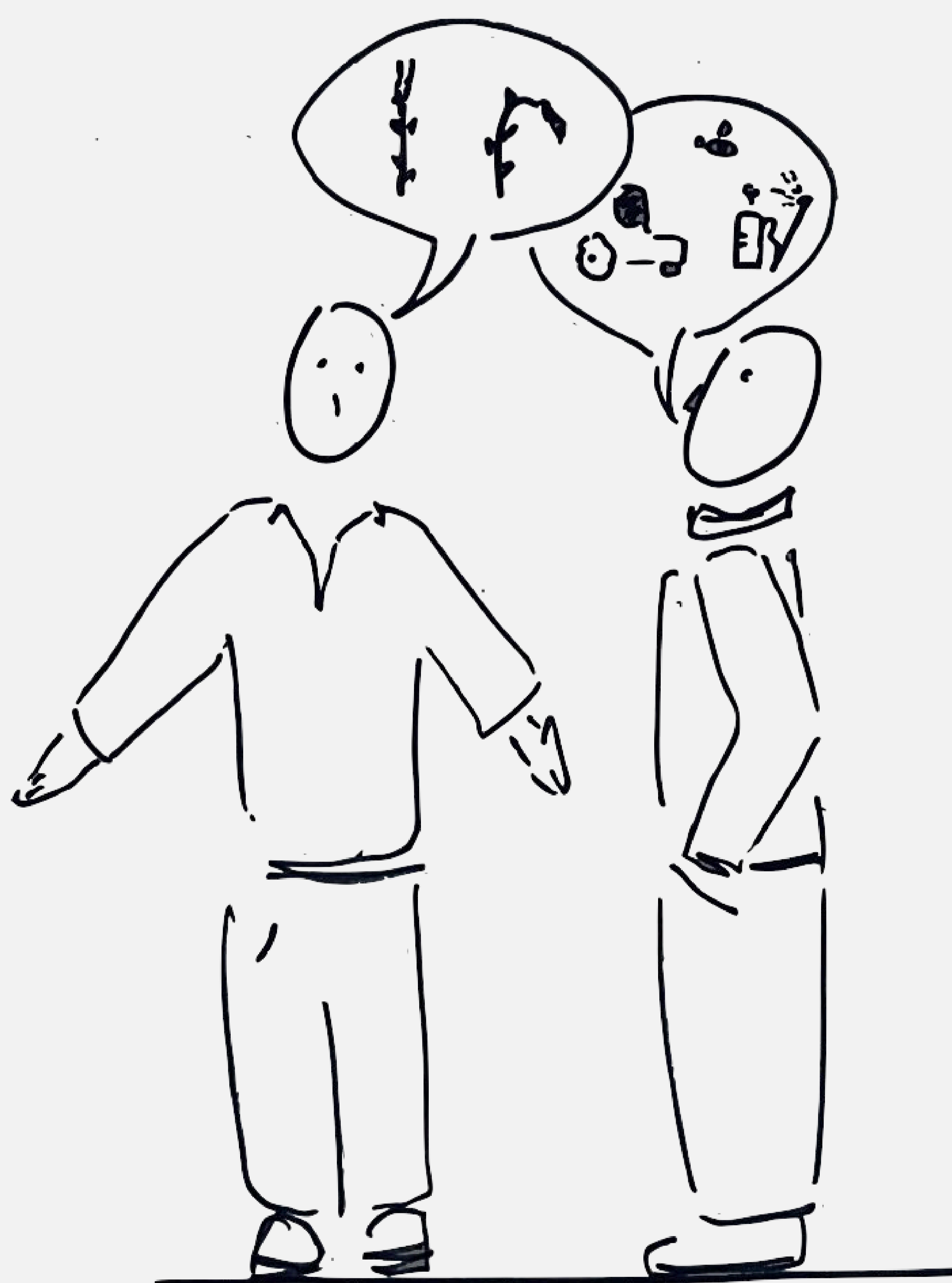
Explain
clearly what has been demonstrated

2

Make explicit
the implications

3

Interpret
the new information and its implications

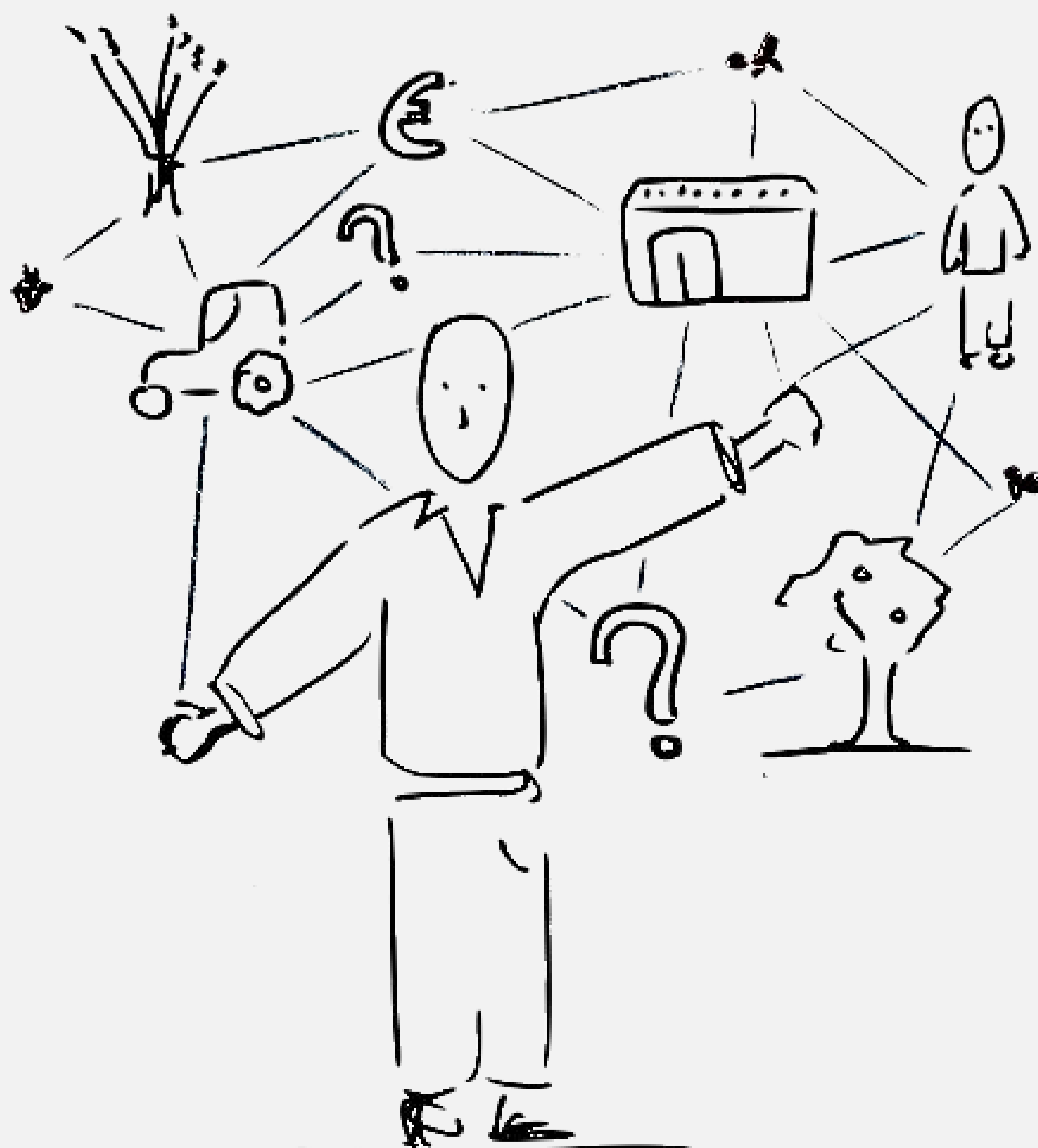




Think

Get people thinking by **highlighting comparisons** such as between ‘previous and new practises’ conflicts, challenges and learnings. Perhaps redirect the focus on the visitors by asking about their own practises to encourage some self-reflection. Pose ‘why is that...?’ and ‘what if...?’ questions. Maybe you have some questions yourself for which the visitors might have some answers.

- | | | | |
|----------------------------------|--|--|--|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Sum-up | Compare | Question | Oppose |
| what you have discussed and seen | topics, to draw out strengths and weaknesses | attendees’ opinions to encourage self-reflection | opinions to promote debate and challenge conventional thinking |





Finish

Summarise the day and conclude with your 'take home' messages. Also allow some time with the group to evaluate what they have learned and if anything, specific has surprised or intrigued them. This is also a good time to gain some quick feedback and idea of what demonstrations or activities worked well.

1

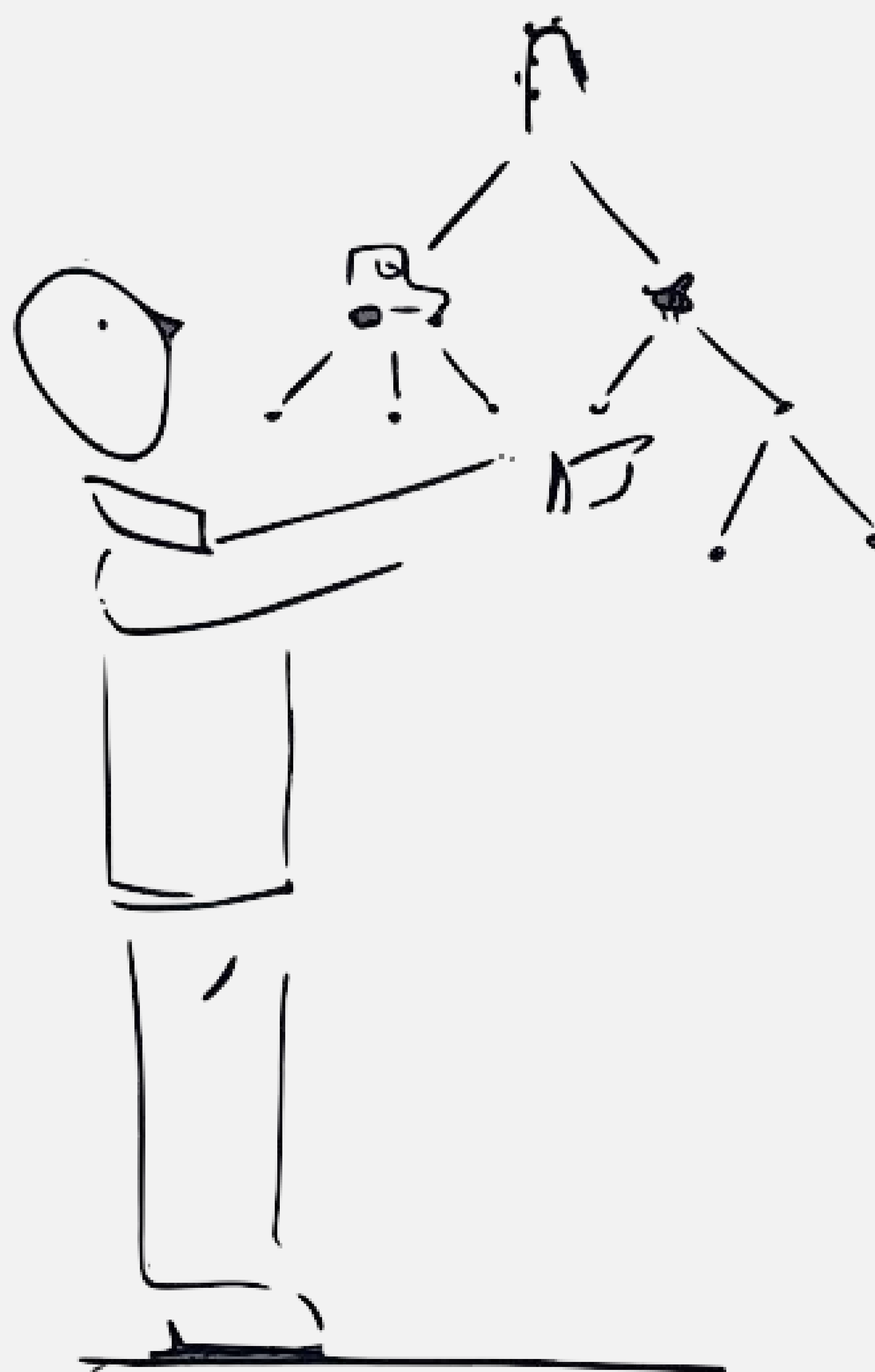
Summarise
what you have seen and
learned

2

Conclude
what you have achieved

3

Evaluate
what has gone well and what
could be improved



Case Study 5

Closing a Weeding Robot demonstration

📍 **Farm Location:**
Netherlands

👤 **Sector**
Outdoor vegetables



Kit

Robot (or other technology), enough time given for discussion at the end of the day.

Action

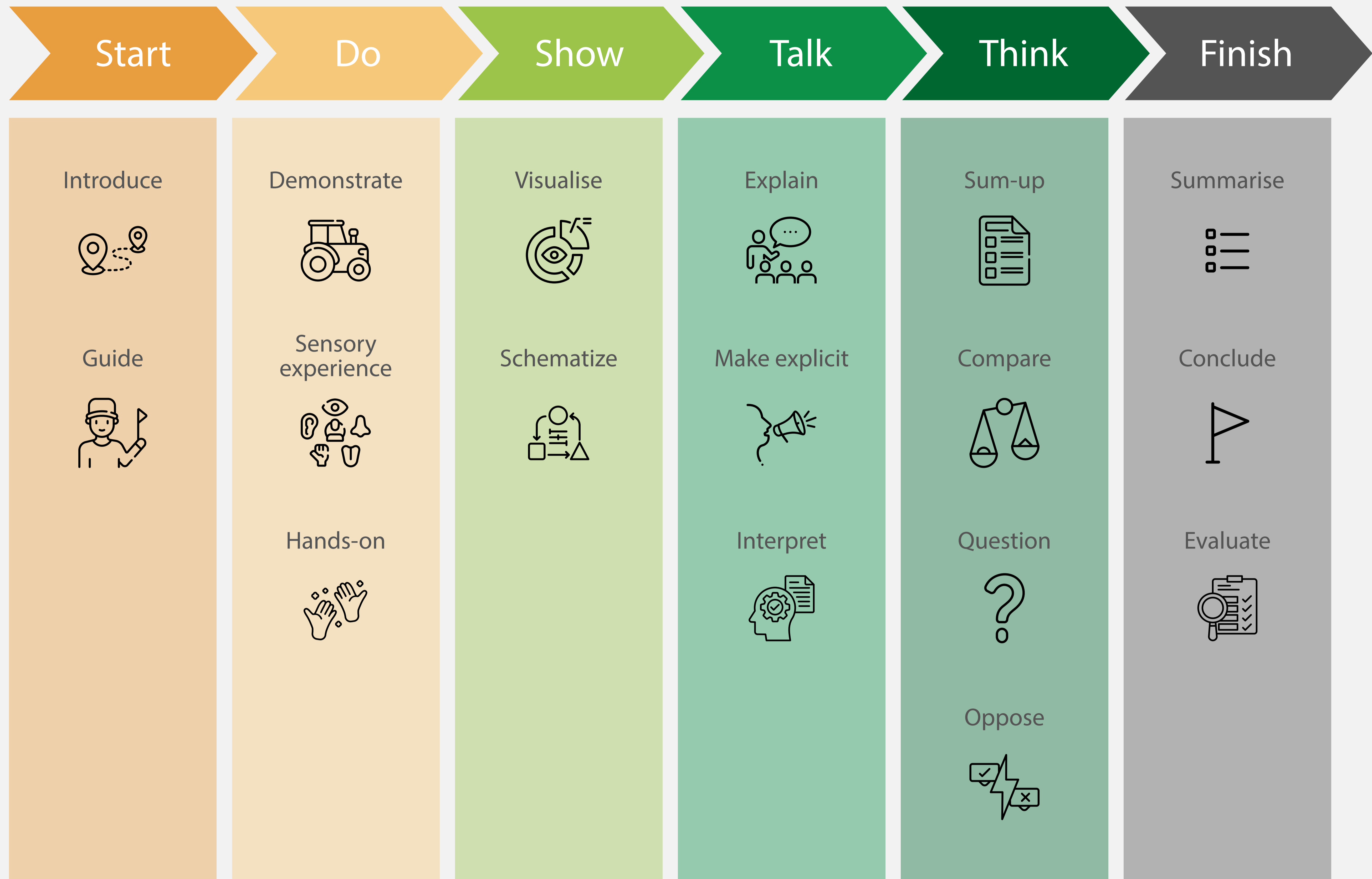
After the demonstration of one of the first weeding robots to be used on farm the host did two very important things to close of the meeting:

- First the group was asked to sum up all positive aspects and then all points for improvement for this robot, based on their observations. They did a round of the group so that everybody had the opportunity to share.
- Second, the visit was concluded by the host always repeating the purpose of the practices demonstrated and with the purpose of meeting. It is a good idea to start and finish with this, to clarify the goal, focus the minds on what is the purpose of the day and framing the opportunities and limits of what was shown.

Outcome

- The 'sum up' question to the group, activates rational thinking, emphasising both positive and negative aspects, giving everybody the opportunity to give their opinion, but focussing on actual observations.
- Repeating the purposes of the practises shown within the conclusion helps summarises the meeting's lessons learnt and discussion point that the farmers can continue debating at home. During such meetings it is not always possible to have open, detailed discussions, but people may chat between each other. Finalising with the key message makes sure that all knowledge shared between the farmers is clear.

Summary on the 6 Steps



Lists

Example Kit List	
Posters and print outs	
Agenda, attendee registration sheet, feedback forms	
Props e.g. spade, containers, crop and pest samples	
Pens, A3 paper, post-it notes	
Signs and parking directions	
Safety equipment, high vis jackets	

Check List	
Story and main messages have been decided	
Overall aim for the day is confirmed and understood	
Demonstrations have been prepped and props/kit collected	
Staff are aware of their roles for the day	
Catering, toilet facilities, etc. have been arranged	
Health and Safety measures have been applied, risk assessment prepared	
Presentations and activities have been prepared and timed	
Farm walk route has been confirmed and tested	
Review and feedback process is in place	