FEAL: Multifunctional farming and european agricultural landscapes

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Received 3 July 2020 | Accepted 8 July 2020 | Published 24 August 2020

Abstract

The FEAL project, developed and accepted within the frame of Erasmus+ Key Action 2 (cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices), took place from December 1st, 2016 to May 31st, 2019. The article gives an overview of the project, the project’s partners, aims and findings and last but not least the results and where to find them.1

Keywords

Case Studies, Erasmus+, E-Atlas on european agricultural landscapes, multifunctional farming, sustainability, training modules

What is FEAL?

The abbreviation stands for “Multifunctional Farming for the Sustainability of European Agricultural Landscapes”. The project’s primary aim was to provide new opportunities through self-education material in order to create opportunities on farms while valorising the cultural landscape. The project was funded by Erasmus+, which is the EU’s programme to support education, training, youth and sport in Europe. Its budget of 14.7 billion euros will provide opportunities for over four million Europeans to study, train, and gain experience abroad.2 It is open not only to young people but to professionals as well, providing and fostering lifelong training and education.

European Agricultural Landscapes (EALs) have a high cultural value,3 playing a crucial role in the conservation of biodiversity.4 Furthermore EALs form the basis for a sustainable, healthy and profitable food production while providing an income source for young farmers, and family farmers, landowners and young entrepreneurs.5 People living in rural areas, where access to Vocational Education and training (VET) is not always easy, may represent a group at risk of exclusion when it comes to lifelong learning and education.6 The FEAL consortium has detected the need for an easy access to training offers and training materials, free of charge. However, in rural areas, possibilities for educational training in cultivating the landscape in accordance with the societal demands, while adapting to the changing climatic, economic and EU political conditions, are lacking. Due to the individual situation of each farmer and young entrepreneur, such educational training offers should also be individually adaptable and, above all, also accessible in remote regions. Considering that internet access could be slow and unstable, the FEAL EDUWEB training materials should be accessible both online and offline. Therefore, a pdf file can be created to provide offline learning material.

Project’s Partners

• Technical University Zvolen (Slovakia): Project leader
• Institute for Research on European Agricultural Landscapes e.V. (EUCALAND) (Germany): Database, FEAL E-Atlas
• Hof und Leben GmbH (Germany): Counselling for agricultural family farms: Case Study database & FEAL Eduweb training materials
• ON Projects Advising SL (Spain): Supervision of publicly-funded projects: project audit
Figure 1. The FEAL consortium and their locations throughout Europe (by Martina Slamová).

- Union de Agricultores y Ganaderos-Jovenes Agricultores de Jaén (Spain): representation of farmers’ interests: Case Study database & FEAL Eduweb training materials
- Biotehniški Center Naklo (Slovenia): Public education institution: Case Study database & FEAL Eduweb training materials
- Local Action Group Lag Middle Tiber (Italy): Implementation of LEADER initiatives: Case Study database & FEAL Eduweb training materials
- European Landowners Organization (Belgium): Representation of landowners’ interests at the European level: Dissemination

Aims of the project

The thirty-month Erasmus+ project took place from December 2016 to May 2019. It aimed to provide young farmers and young entrepreneurs in rural areas with ideas to develop and implement innovative cultivation concepts that both promote their own interests while fulfilling the demands of the society.

Based on case studies and an E-Atlas of European Agricultural Landscapes, the FEAL project developed a flexible training system that promotes sustainable entrepreneurship in rural regions, answering to an EU-wide demand (EU 2013). These freely-available and training modules, provided free of charge, are called hereafter e-learning tools since they concern online course materials for self-study. They comprise thematic reports, literature and photo collections and progress reports.

Practical examples, which explain successful enterprises and concepts also include calculations, which can be exchanged all over the EU. They show how win-win situations can be created and encourage innovative corporate activity. Numerous online interviews provided the project with details about missing, desired, and necessary information, as well as work materials at the European and national levels, which makes it possible to pass these on to the corresponding political and administrative authorities. Another added value of this project is the homepage links to several thematically related Erasmus projects which also provide e-Learning tools. Therefore, the farmers can complete a series of vocational training starting from the FEAL website.

Project’s results

The FEAL project has enabled the creation of FEAL-EDUWEB, an online self-training education system available in seven languages: English, French, German, Italian, Slovakian, Slovenian and Spanish. Its aim is to provide materials, ideas and solutions to demonstrate how multifunctional farming with respect for the European Agricultural Landscapes (EALs) can benefit young farmers and family farmers. In this regard it develops and improves knowledge on entrepreneurial opportunities, identifying strengths and weaknesses, taking initiatives...
Figure 2. The FEAL Case Study Database provides information about successful multifunctional farming. These can be sorted by countries, keywords or according to EAL (https://cs.feal-future.org/en/case-studies).

and stimulating a positive attitude towards innovation and change.

The **FEAL-EDUWEB** comprises four parts: a Summary Report, the FEAL Case Studies database, the E-Atlas on EALs and a set of five training modules including a self-assessment questionnaire with each module. The **Summary Report** is an introductory document that compiles state-of-the-art reports on the relation between sustainable and multifunctional farming practices and EALs. Furthermore it also contains the corresponding legal framework and the situation of VET. The Summary Report was assembled from the results of five national
Figure 3. The FEAL E-Atlas Database provides information on European Agricultural Landscapes. They can be sorted by countries, landscape types or key words (https://www.feal-future.org/eatlas/en).

state-of-the-art reports from Germany, Italy, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain, which had been enriched with EU statistics. It is a basic resource for raising awareness in the importance of sustainable and multifunctional farming practices among stakeholders and the general public. It provides the user with e-learning tools, and an introduction to the concept that will be addressed in the other training resources of FEAL-EDUWEB.

The second pillar of the FEAL-EDUWEB is the FEAL Case Studies database which contains twenty-eight case studies from five countries which demonstrate best practices for successful business strategies in sustainable and multifunctional farming, while maintaining the values and quality of EALs. Using e-learning tools, the Case Studies are provided to help the user see how others are managing their landscapes throughout Europe. They bring real experiences from farmers which were collected through interviews and standardised questionnaires. They also include pictures of farms, the surrounding agricultural landscape, farm location maps, and interactive PDFs that link the individual farm production and activities with the surrounding EALs.

The third outcome is the E-Atlas on EALs which explains and demonstrates the diversity of EALs across Europe. Each farm is located on a particular agricultural landscape. Although agricultural landscapes are all around us, and people feel attached to them, living in cities result in a lack of information on their histories, characteristics and management.” Therefore, EUCALAND was founded in 2006 to collect information and knowledge about EALs. The collected data have been used to build the FEAL-E-Atlas. While there is a variety of landscapes in Europe, there are also similarities in their natural and/or agricultural environment, and in part, in their history. This E-Atlas helps the users of the e-learning tools understand why some landscape features are valuable and why they are important for the preservation of the landscape character. This knowledge can help users promote their activities and to transfer landscape added values into financial income for entrepreneurship.

Finally, the five Training Modules incorporate theoretical knowledge from the Summary Report, implementation models of best practices represented by case studies, and from the farm environment expressed through the E-Atlas. Each Training Module is provided with a self-assessment questionnaire, enabling the user to check what knowledge and competences he/she has acquired.

Five national and one international multiplier event in Brussels, next to various dissemination materials, helped promote the FEAL-EDUWEB. It is important now that as many young farmers, family farmers and young rural entrepreneurs make use of the training materials in order to create win-win situations for the European Agricultural Landscapes and the European farmers. Therefore, advertising and promoting of the FEAL-EDUWEB continues through scientific conferences and in practitioners’ journals and meetings, not only by the different project partners but also through publications and by the national Slovakian Erasmus+ agency.
Figure 4. FEAL EDUWEB contains five interactive modules, which all include a self-evaluation questionnaire (https://cs.feal-future.org/en/training).

Where to find the results of the FEAL project?

Project Website: https://cs.feal-future.org/en
FEAL Case Studies Database: https://cs.feal-future.org/en/case-studies2
FEAL Training Modules: https://cs.feal-future.org/en/training
All materials are available in English, French, German, Italian, Slovakian, Slovenian and Spanish

Bibliography


Endnotes

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4. Roth et al., ‘Europäische Agrarlandschaften’.
5. OECD, Multifunctionality.
8. Kruse et al., Summary Report