

Abstract

A preliminary version of the educational package AgriSkills was field tested in Bulgaria, Germany, and Spain in early 2016. These field tests were observed and analysed, and the test participants and their instructors evaluated their involvement with the package. To these ends, qualitative and quantitative methods of collecting data were employed. The results showed that AgriSkills was viewed almost entirely positively, and some participants had very positive opinions of the package. It must be said, however, that some differences were noted: the module received higher ratings in Bulgaria than in Germany and Spain. Furthermore, varying ratings were given for the learning phases and work forms (see diagram 9 and table 1).

AgriSkills elements related to practice (the farm rally, for example) as well as the module's interactive phases (such as the game Lucky Pig !) received significantly better ratings than "good". Evaluations for the obviously more theoretical specialised texts were generally positive, although they were also viewed as controversial by some participants. This does not pose a problem, however, for the specialised texts can be selected or tailored by instructors for specific contexts or target groups. Also controversial and – especially when compared to the positive overall ratings – rather critical were the evaluations of AgriSkills' direct applicability. Significantly, the opportunities for immediate use were viewed as the module's future and potential application in the participants' own occupational praxis. This clearly illustrates that the participants' evaluation of AgriSkills was by all means well considered: AgriSkills is aimed more at changing attitudes and values than conveying skills. Abstracted from the respective concrete and individual working conditions, we can expect that the knowledge learned and reflections set in motion generally will not immediately influence work practices but will have a more medium-term effect.

The fact that participants are aware of this fact is indicative of the transparent communication of AgriSkills' key educational objective: the development of well-founded competencies in the area of sustainable agriculture based on the examples of the husbandry, feeding, and marketing of beef cattle and fattening pigs. In this regard, it is interesting to note that the participants in Bulgaria had a much more optimistic view regarding concrete feasibility than participants in Germany and Spain. This might have something to do with different agricultural structures: the small farms predominating in Bulgaria can react in a much more flexible manner than the mid-sized and larger operations. However, the at times greater variances in the evaluation of AgriSkills evidently has more to do with the participants' varying base levels and differing educational experiences.

The weighting of the sustainability aspect in the three field tests displayed slight differences. Regardless of these differences in the three trial runs, however, the field tests brought the following to light:

- Sustainability can only be achieved by harmonising ecology, social issues, and economy.
- The demands placed on sustainable agriculture are similar throughout Europe.

In this sense the field tests made it clear that the implementation of AgriSkills as a European project is a primary goal.

The field tests offer impressive evidence of AgriSkills' attractiveness. This in turn encourages the project partners to comprehensively and reflectively apply the insights arising from the analysis when it comes to the module's further development:

- Less positive ratings were taken into account when it came to improving the entire package during the final phase of the project.
- The perhaps less-than-clear relationship between theory and praxis was clarified throughout the development of the educational software.
- The challenges faced by instructors in implementing AgriSkills in a creative and target-group-oriented fashion were more clearly fleshed out in the manuals.

Generally speaking, field test analyses clearly indicated that the educational package is easy to use and is happily or even enthusiastically embraced by participants. AgriSkills thus fulfils the goal of encouraging an ever greater role for sustainable thinking and actions among all learners and workers in the European agricultural sphere. The relationship between a concrete regional point of reference and the shared European agricultural challenges, both today and in the future, is one of AgriSkills' key elements. The module is well positioned to play a role in the strengthening sustainable European agriculture's identity and thus has a role to play in promoting cohesion within the European Union.