



PRACTICE ABSTRACT

Digital technology

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FARMCAFE: AN ONLINE MEETING SPACE FOR FLEMISH FARMERS

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FarmCafe is a tool in use since 2015 which aims to provide an online platform for farmers to connect with other farmers, advisors and experts, so they can develop ideas together.

This digital platform provides inspiration to professional farmers in Flanders and provides the space to post questions, read articles and develop business ideas and innovative plans. The goal of this platform is to develop new digital ways for farmers to receive information and support from a team of experts, which allows farmers to gain a clear view of their agricultural businesses. Farmers can turn to this community to find information on the challenges of today and tomorrow facing agriculture, such as new regulations, farm succession, and economic and technological developments.

With the decrease in the farming population in Belgium, coupled to the challenges in farm succession, there is a demand for online services like FarmCafe. At the same time, there are cuts to advisory services resulting in less time available for traditional advisory work. Here, FarmCafe is a useful tool in support of the more traditional services of agricultural advice. Recently, the Covid-19 lockdowns and reduced in-person meetings have also shown the importance of new (digital) forms of communication, between farmers and advisors. Tools like FarmCafe can support this move towards digital forms of advice.

Application scenario

Digital meeting space for farmers and advisors for knowledge exchange

Digital technologies

web interface, digital online platform

Socio-economic impact

- Economic: Favours the creation of organisations and networks, enhancing, cooperation and marketing of farm products. Social: Acquisition of skills and learning by farmers. Improved access to relevant information and experiences, Social capital through participation.

More info: <https://www.farmcafe.be/>



Purpose of the tool

The purpose of FarmCafe is to provide an online meeting space for Flemish professional farmers. Through this online tool, farmers can develop their networks, get into contact with advisors and experts, and develop new ideas for their farms. The goal is to allow farmers a space with a low barrier-to-entry, which they can use to obtain new information, experiences and ideas from other people in farming. FarmCafe also has tools where farmers can develop their plans in collaboration. The tool is developed by traditional knowledge providers, ensuring quality and confidence in the advice received.

Description of the tool

FarmCafe is a digital platform that promotes the inclusion of many different types of farmers, while improving the access of farmers to information, skills and learning. Through this platform, farmers can strengthen their business plans and their farm management.

The online platform is an easily accessible tool (only requiring an internet connection), consisting of a website in a secure environment. Farmers retain ownership over the data and information that they add to the website.

Farmers can sign up for free and access most of the information directly. Private spaces can also be created, where farmers in Flanders can develop their ideas with a more select group of advisors and peers. Getting into contact with people outside of the traditional social groups can also increase innovativeness and lead to new and creative business ideas. At the same time, this tool answers the need for a new form of advisory services and can alleviate the impacts of cuts to traditional farmer advisory and extension programmes. Online meeting spaces do not fully replace the in-person meetings, but can be an important addition to more traditional services.

Areas of socio-economic impacts

Social	<p>The FarmCafe platform stimulates peer-to-peer learning by farmers. Farmers can use the new knowledge and skills to improve their farm management.</p> <p>Through this platform the access to relevant information and experiences by farmers is improved. The tool allows farmers the connection with advisors and a team of experts and the development of innovative plans.</p>
Economic	<p>It is foreseen that the tool will favour cooperation among farmers, and a better positioning of the farms through improved and more innovative business plans.</p>