

'IPV Região Impulsiona e Inclui'

Bright Learning Farm Field Schools (BLFs) as an experimental learning pathway

To enhance the symbiosis between traditional knowledge and modern rural technologies, from digital to precision, and to address different target audiences that have limited access to education, information, extension services, market access and financial capital, **Bright Learning Farm-Field Schools (BLFs)** are proposed as **an experimental learning pathway that should contribute** to enhance knowledge and skills towards a successful management of increasingly complex agro-ecosystems and market access. Improving skills (technical, technological and digital) and increasing social and economic leverage are core priorities to enable sustainable food systems in rural territories, increasing production, productivity and income, and reducing exclusion and the poverty trap.

In the inner regions of Portugal, farmers, specially smallholder family farmers, and other rural land users manage increasingly fragile ecosystems while also being subjected to changes driven by political or economic pressures outside their control. Yet these land users are the world's largest group of custodians of biodiversity and play a critical role in efficiently managing natural resources like water, soil and biodiversity, thus ensuring that future generations can also continue to use and benefit from these resources. Climate change further complicates the management of future agricultural systems, requiring an array of adaptation and mitigation measures. To meet increased food demands in the future, strategies are needed to intensify food production sustainably. Sustainable intensification by its nature needs to be location-specific: it must take account of local ecology as well as local socio-economic conditions in order to respond to local opportunities.

For that reason, youth and adult farmers and other stakeholders (from politicians to consumers) must be able to access ecology-literacy training, where new knowledge is generated locally to fit specific conditions, allowing them to master the management skills required to play a leading role in sustainably intensifying production.

With their holistic nature, in which the technical, social and financial domains of farmers lives are addressed concurrently, and their focus on developing critical decision-making capacity, BLFs may play a critical role in supporting farmers needs in this challenging context. There is now general recognition that sustainability of the agricultural improvement process is not necessarily found in the technologies introduced, but rather in the social process of active farmer-managed innovation and dissemination of ideas where farmers and other stakeholders manage and influence ecological processes. This might be achieved by the farmer and other rural stakeholders' participation in the innovation process and on the facilitation of experimentation among communities, thus creating a need for 'platforms' for learning among actors

Standardized technology packages which seek to maximize commodity yields, delivered to users by experts

Partnerships with farmers and other rural stakeholders to co-produce innovation, creativity and flexibility in dealing with agroecology and sustainable food systems



By seeking for partnerships involving youth, adults and educators, the BLFs may play a much broader role in society than simply as vehicle for agricultural development. They provide a platform for adult education more broadly and can fill a critical gap in societies and territories with higher educational and technical gaps, promoting social and territorial cohesion.

Not only learning processes need to evolve, be tested and adjust to a huge diversity of learners (from youth to adults, from newcomers do professionals, from IT educated to IT beginners), but also the technical contents related with agroecology and sustainable food systems, as well as the means of the extension/dissemination strategies applied. Learners, once empowered to diagnose, decide and act to enhance agro-ecosystem services, are then able to continue adapting and improving their tools and thereby their strategies, to deal with complex and evolving food systems, in a context of climate changes and a accelerated market evolution.

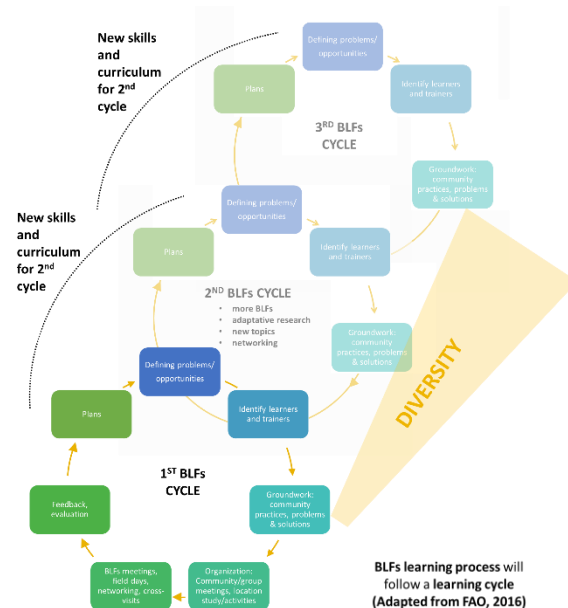
The BLFs learning process

Each **BLFs learning process** will follow a **learning cycle**, that will be evaluated in order to validate the training and the process.

An **BLFs** brings together a group of learners to engage in a process of “**hands-on field-based**” learning over a learning cycle, based on the concept form “**seed to seed**” or “**egg to egg**” or “**farm to fork**”. This learning cycle aims to strengthen learners’ skills and knowledge for critical analysis, to test and validate new concepts/practices and to assist in making informed decisions. The learning process will reinforce the understanding of complex relations at the agroecosystem level, but also of cultural, social and economic nature.

The **BLFs** learning cycle also aims at enhancing participants’ group cohesion so that they can better work as a group, analyse questions or problems critically, draw on their own experience and observations and the experience and knowledge of others, create a consensus, and prepare follow-up actions once the **BLFs** learning cycle finishes. Through group dynamics exercises and discussions, **BLFs** helps create a basic understanding of how groups, collaboration and cooperative work function. The **BLFs** also includes activities that encourage participants in critical analysis and evaluation, and planning for further action once the **BLFs** learning cycle is completed.

However, field practice has a number of limitations and challenges that need to be taken into consideration when deciding on the potential use of **BLFs**, such as the quality of learning, the facilitator and mentors, space, duration and costs, flexibility to different contents, learners and professional contexts.



So, **BLFs** will be implemented as an experimental project, whose ante- and post-impact assessment will be designed, considering the complexity and inter-sectoral nature of the training towards a successful climate transition.