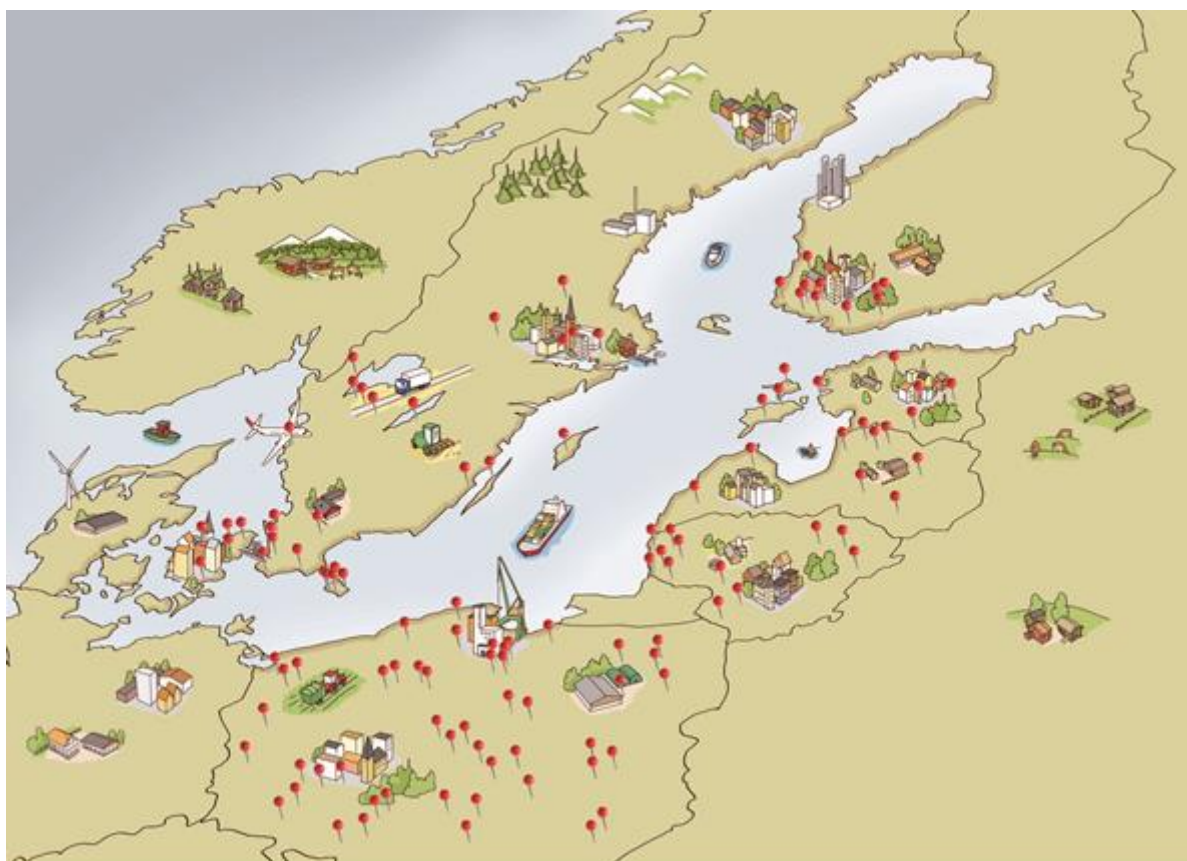


# USING DEMONSTRATION FARMS FOR A HEALTHIER BALTIC SEA



*Within the three-year Baltic Deal project with participants from seven countries, 120 demonstration farms were established. There was a network of farms within the countries and also farms in different countries. This report studies the need and advantage of demonstration farms and what can be learned from them.*

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**May 2015**

Baltic Deal BRIDGE is a project building upon the former Baltic Deal project. Baltic Deal Bridge is carried out with financial support from the Swedish Institute during the period 2014-2016. All results from this project are added under the rightmost heading "Baltic Deal Bridge" at the top of this web page. [www.balticdeal.eu](http://www.balticdeal.eu)

CONCLUSIONS .....	2
PREFACE .....	3
ANTHROPOGENIC IMPACT ON THE BALTIC SEA.....	4
DEMONSTRATION FARMS WITHIN BALTIC DEAL .....	6
DEMONSTRATION FARMS INSPIRE.....	7
DEMONSTRATION FARMS AS A CONCEPT .....	9
COMBINED COMPULSORY AND VOLUNTARY EFFORTS ARE BEST .....	9
BEHAVIOUR CHANGE THROUGH ADVISORY SERVICES .....	10
FARMERS' VIEWS .....	11
FARMERS' MEETINGS .....	12
QUALITATIVE STUDY TRIPS.....	13
SHOWING IMPROVEMENTS IN NUMBERS .....	15
FUTURE NEEDS .....	16

## CONCLUSIONS

- Demonstration farms are an important and appreciated tool to increase knowledge transfer between farmers and increase the rate of implantation of new ideas among farmers.
- Combined political powers and measures in all countries around the Baltic Sea are needed to improve the situation in the Baltic Sea.
- Baltic Deal and the Baltic Deal Bridge farm network fulfil an important function in bringing about change. The demonstration farms are used to spread knowledge and show the practical measures implemented. They inspire other farmers to carry out measures that decrease the load on the Baltic Sea.
- The collaboration and networking between the countries has been very positive. Exchange of knowledge leads to change.
- The demonstration farms are also used to test new solutions and several are participating in research and development projects.
- Demonstration farms need to be chosen carefully in order to show good practice and generally act as a good example. They should also represent different production specialisations and be available at different sites in the countries around the Baltic Sea.
- For the work with demonstration farms to fully succeed, good collaboration is needed between farmers, advisors and researchers.
- The network makes farmers aware that everyone must play their part. It is a great educational benefit to see and hear that other farmers are taking action. In a survey, almost everyone believed that 'other countries' release more pollutants. Farmers need to feel that they are not alone in their struggle to improve the environment

## **PREFACE**

This report was produced within the project Baltic Deal Bridge which is financed by the Swedish Institute, to gather experiences of exchanges between farmers and advisors in the countries around the Baltic Sea. It was written by Helena Elmquist from “Odling i Balans” (Farming in Balance) and Marek Krysztoforski from the Polish Agricultural Advisory Service Radom (CDR). It is based on experiences during the project period, interviews with farmers in Poland and Sweden and input from other experts and collaboration partner. Some facts are based on an interview with Magnus Ljung, an expert within environmental communication and collaboration working at SLU in Sweden.

This report presents a clear message on the benefits of collaboration between countries around the Baltic Sea and the importance of continuing to maintain close dialogue at grassroots level between farmers and advisors. The Baltic Sea is the joint responsibility of all of us.

*Peter Wallenberg, LRF*

*Stockholm, 2015*

## ANTHROPOGENIC IMPACT ON THE BALTIC SEA

The Baltic Sea is an inland sea with particularly sensitive conditions. There is relatively little exchange of water from the Baltic and the environment is sensitive. Around 90 million people live in the catchment area around the Baltic Sea. The countries around the Baltic Sea comprise a cultural landscape that has changed greatly since the 60-70<sup>th</sup>. Many rivers and streams have been straightened and there are more major cities, with varying degrees of wastewater treatment. All those living and working around the Baltic Sea directly or indirectly affect the status of the Baltic Sea.



*Figure 1. The catchment area of the Baltic Sea, which is home to around 90 million people. Illustration H. von Corswant*

During the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the Baltic Sea has suffered severe eutrophication as a result of inflows of phosphorus and nitrogen pollutants. Around one quarter of the total nitrogen and phosphorus inputs via water courses around the Baltic Sea and the Danish straits originate from natural sources. The remaining three quarters are of anthropogenic origin, i.e. are caused by man. Emissions from wastewater treatment plants and industries and leaching from agricultural and forest soils are the most important sources. Since 1980 the nutrient input to the Baltic Sea has been declining and nowadays the internal loading from the sediments stands for the biggest part of the

impact. Recent studies show that the internal loading is three times higher than the combined total input from the surrounding countries, this is due to former loadings which has accumulated in the sediment and now is being released.



*Figure 2. Algal bloom south of Utklippan in Blekinge, Sweden. (Photo: Kustbevakningen<sup>1</sup>).*

When nutrients are added, growth of biomass increases. When the plants die, the organic material sinks to the bottom and is broken down by different decomposers. Aerobic decomposers use the oxygen in the water and oxygen deficiency arises. Under oxygen deficiency, ammonium and phosphorus are released from the sediment and when these compounds are mixed into the surface water they contribute to further eutrophication of the sea. If the oxygen concentration falls below 2 ml per litre, fish disappear. When all the oxygen is used, hydrogen sulphate is formed during the decomposition of organic material. Hydrogen sulphate is toxic and kills all bottom-dwelling animals, which cannot escape (Figure 3).

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<sup>1</sup>(<http://www.kustbevakningen.se/sv/media/bildarkiv/alger/>)



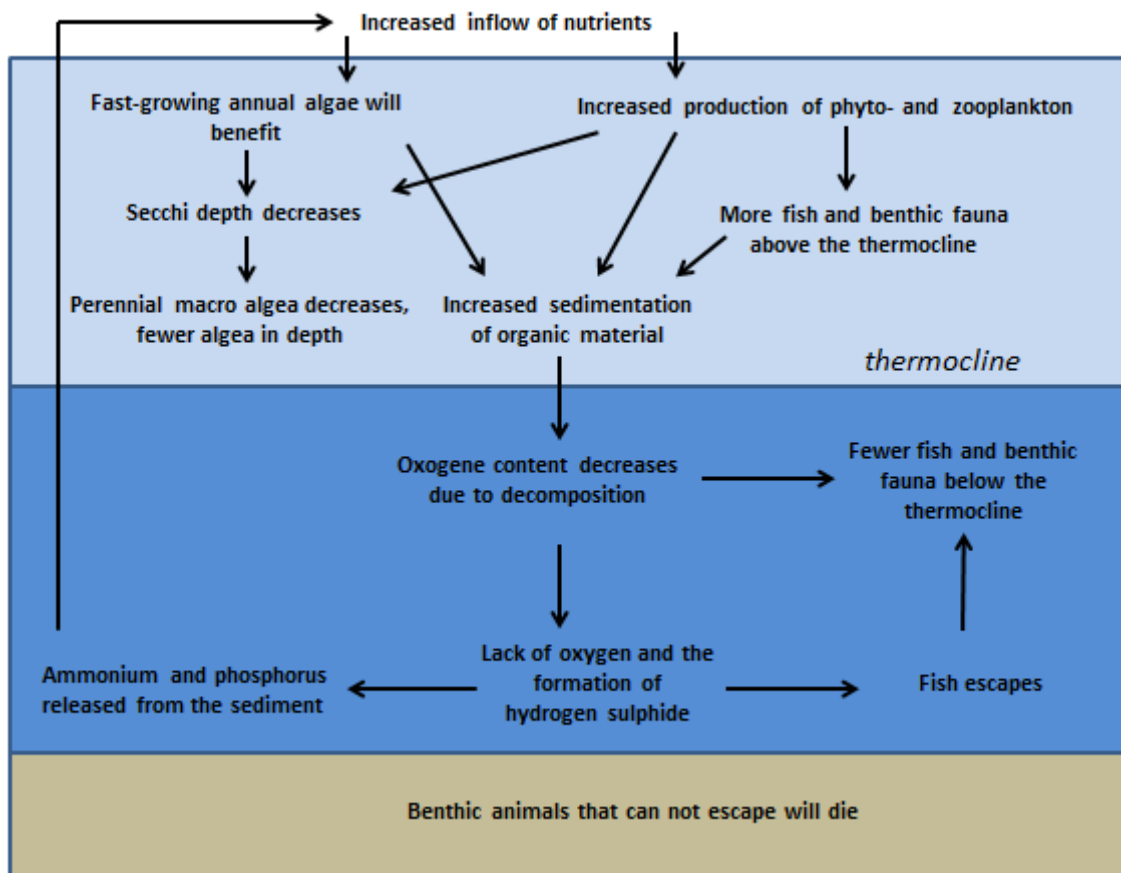


Figure 3. Schematic diagram showing how eutrophication, oxygen deficiency and algal bloom arise due to increased inflows of nutrients to the Baltic Sea.

Algal bloom is a natural phenomenon and is part of the normal life cycle of algae. Different types of algae bloom at different times of the year, depending on light, temperature, nutrient status and competition with other species. However, due to high concentrations of plant nutrients and an imbalance between nitrogen and phosphorus, excessive algal bloom occurs. The nitrogen-fixing cyanobacteria supply the Baltic Sea with almost 400 000 tons of nitrogen per year. This is the same amount as supplied by people through emissions. Mass incidence of cyanobacteria causes problems in the water, e.g. because many of these species produce toxins. In order to prevent an imbalance in the sea and an accompanying algal bloom, the concentrations of both nitrogen and phosphorus must be lowered. To achieve a Baltic Sea with the same nutrient status as it had in the 1940s, we must decrease inputs by more than half. This is a tough political challenge and affects all countries around the Baltic Sea.

## DEMONSTRATION FARMS WITHIN BALTIC DEAL

The Baltic Deal project was initiated to permit exchange of experiences between farmers, advisors and countries around the Baltic Sea, with the aim of decreasing the impact on the Baltic Sea. There was a network of farms within the countries and also a network of farms and organisations in different countries. The national advisory services organisations and also in some cases farmers' organisations were involved in the Baltic Sea network. A number of conferences and study visits to pilot farms were organised throughout the project period.

A number of pilot farms were selected in each country as a basis for exchange of knowledge. This resulted in 120 demonstration farms. These farms formed the base and were used to describe production, display the status quo, estimate current plant nutrient losses and identify measures leading to decreased nutrient losses. Advisors in each country were engaged to document and monitor production and to suggest remedial measures. These measures were evaluated from both an environmental and cost perspective. The pilot farms acted as meeting places for exchange of knowledge and a number of farmers' meetings were arranged on demonstration farms.

The Baltic Deal project network consisted of farmers' and advisory services organisations in Poland, Sweden, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Denmark and Finland. In the follow-up project Baltic Deal Bridge, Norway and Russia are also involved. Industrial parties such as Yara contributed to the project, primarily with technical support.

## DEMONSTRATION FARMS INSPIRE

In a survey of farmers on some islands in the Baltic Sea, practically all respondents said that *"Farmers in other countries emit more than we do"*. There is an important educational component in having a joint network around the Baltic Sea and that is to show that all farming contributes more or less to the eutrophication in the Baltic Sea. It may be necessary to adjust some measures so that the collective measures are cost-effective, but the fundamental principle is that the Baltic Sea is a joint responsibility and no-one should blame anyone else. This basic principle is confirmed in a thesis entitled *From Words to Action – Lessons from Active Stakeholder Participation in Water Management*,<sup>2</sup> which states that: *"The local water group meetings revealed a situation which could be considered as a collective action dilemma: farmers were reluctant to commit to mitigation measures and further undertakings in agriculture if other actors' activities were not brought to the front."*

The network of farmers has therefore in an educational way demonstrated that there is a will among others and that measures are being introduced in other countries. It can otherwise be easy to think that other countries should act first. Many environmental issues today are global and it is therefore important for farmers to set the impact of their own farm in a greater context. The Baltic Deal network has an important function in demonstrating that measures are being taken in different places around the Baltic Sea.

At a workshop in LRF in Sweden, participants emphasised the importance of showing good examples and demonstrating the opportunities available. A forum for social exchanges between farmers is needed. Training provides the inspiration to think positively and share both positive and negative experiences.

Countries around the Baltic Sea have a disparate political history and several countries have been under hard political control by another party. There are examples of abuse of power by the authorities and that can make farmers sceptical about listening to new advice. Actually experiencing and understanding the benefit of a measure makes it more interesting to think along new lines. A Swedish farmer put it like this: *"Farmers today are well-educated and want to get involved in*

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<sup>2</sup>Franzen Frida. 2015. From Words to Action - Lessons from Active Stakeholder Participation in Water Management. KTH Land and Water Resources Engineering.

*improving their business. Pointers from above are just counterproductive*". Therefore to achieve real change, there is a need for individual understanding and seeing examples of a measure working for somebody else. When the motivation for change comes from within, it is much more likely to lead to a change. Therefore it is good to see something with one's own eyes, hear and experience what other farmers are doing around the Baltic Sea. When farmers are encouraged to take individual responsibility by acquiring external knowledge themselves, this leads to change.

An edict from above by an authority or an advisors prescribing exactly what farmers should do does not lead to change. Research on advisory services at SLU in Sweden confirms the theory that demonstration farms are a good tool for showing educational examples of different measures. Large agricultural shows provide some inspiration, but a visit to an active farmer who can show a practical solution is more convincing.

When farmers themselves select and develop measures that are suitable for their own farm, this increases their self-esteem and often gives better results. It also leads to pride in their work. When people have done something good, based on their own decisions, they want to show it off. Through showing it off, they inspire others to follow their example. This creates a ripple effect. A farmer in southern Sweden who sets up zero plots to allow him to monitor nitrogen mineralisation and optimise fertiliser use, confirmed that this has led to neighbouring farmers following what he is doing with great interest.

The cost of different measures is of course critical for a farm business. However, a number of the measures to decrease nutrient losses from farms are financially justifiable. Decreased leaching also decreases the cost of purchasing fertiliser. Farmers who tell their own story provide great credibility for others. *"Seeing and doing it yourself is an advantage"*.





*Figure 4. Visit in 2012 to Hacksta Farm. Here participants are studying the fine sediment in the well, which risks being leached out to the neighbouring lake. Therefore this farm has built a phosphorus dam. Photo H. Elmquist*

## **DEMONSTRATION FARMS AS A CONCEPT**

The concept of demonstration farms has been used in different places around the world. The farms are used to show best practice for many different reasons - efficient and high production, environmental protection, energy efficiency, biodiversity etc. They probably work best when there is a close relationship between farmers, advisors and researchers. Experiences from Poland show that a pre-condition for them to work is to have good collaboration between the farmer on the demonstration farm and the advisor/organiser of the demonstration activity.

Farmers and pilot farms are important sources for identifying the need for new research and trials. In Sweden there have been demonstration farms in different schemes since the mid-1800s. They have been of great significance for development in Sweden. There are similar experiences from a number of other countries in Europe.

## **COMBINED COMPULSORY AND VOLUNTARY EFFORTS ARE BEST**

There is a need for compulsory requirements in the form of legislation to eliminate some poor farming. In a Swedish study, this was welcomed by the farmers themselves. They wanted to be sure

that everyone met a minimum level<sup>3</sup>. However, in order to achieve good status, voluntary measures can be a very effective way of reaching a higher target. Subsidies are another way to bring about behaviour change. Norms and general pressure from society to “do the right thing” are also factors guiding behaviour change.

There is great potential to utilise advisory services education to achieve change. This is the way most farmers would choose instead of compulsory legislation. However, most farmers in the Swedish study believed in a combination of legislation and advisory services. Countries around the Baltic Sea have chosen slightly different ways in this regard. The choice is often based on political power and history.

## BEHAVIOUR CHANGE THROUGH ADVISORY SERVICES

In order to achieve better status in the Baltic Sea, behaviour change is required. New knowledge inspires behaviour change and it may be obtained via the advisory services, the farmer’s own experiences and e.g. visits to other farms. It has also been shown that a single visit is not sufficient and that follow-up meetings and discussions are needed before farmers will risk changing strategy. A successful concept used within the Baltic Deal project was to build up a group of farmers who met on a number of occasions to test different ideas against one another. Within the Swedish advisory programme *Greppa Näringen* (Focus on nutrients), it was found that follow-up and reoccurring visits by the advisor were particularly valuable.

Some farmers are pioneers and are quick to test new things. They are the adventurous types who think it is stimulating to test new unresearched areas. They are also inclined to take greater risks. Then comes the followers, who are more sceptical and want to have confirmation by others before they change management strategy. Last comes the stragglers, who perhaps even take pride in going their own way and not following others. They are often the most difficult to convince. Since farmers are so different, there is a need for different strategies to cover all three categories. There is also a need for financial compensation for the pioneers, who make their farm and business available to explore unresearched areas, which always involves great financial risk taking.

Both advisors and farmers need to know which measures lead to decreased nutrient losses. Polish experiences from the project show that the advisor plays a critical role. Experience shows that building up good contact between advisors and farmers is decisive for the results. Some Swedish farmers claimed that there were occasionally problems with advisors lacking the specialist knowledge needed to formulate valuable practical advice.

Farmers are a group are generally regarded as conservative and cautious about new ideas and changes. However, it can sometimes be the case that it is the advisor who is the greatest opponent to introducing new technology. This has been observed e.g. in Sweden. Sometimes it can be forward-looking farmers who lead change. Younger advisors with knowledge of the latest technology may have difficulty in making their voice heard in strong advisory hierarchies and knowledge centres that are fixated on old theories and not receptive to new knowledge. Regardless of new results and new conditions, they continue to promote a certain way of farming. A popular term that summarises this

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<sup>3</sup> Magnus Ljung study.

is amoeba theories, i.e. theories that are manipulated to always give the same result, regardless of empirical measurements and facts.

In the Baltic Deal project, the demonstration farms were ordinary businesses but were also businesses with a well-planned environmental strategy. An alternative to using ordinary farm businesses is to create one or a few specialist super-demonstration farm where the best technology are implemented. These two ways of working with demonstration farms have different aims. The advantage of using ordinary farms as demonstration farms is that it is easier to create a sense of recognition among the visitors. The visitors thus come away with the feeling that the measures are possible on their own farm too. Each farm is unique, so all measures usually need to be specially adapted for use on another farm. The Baltic Deal project was based on many 'ordinary' farms, which can be regarded as an advantage in bringing about change on a number of farms.

## FARMERS' VIEWS

A survey was carried out on farmers living on islands in the Baltic Sea, in other words close to the water.<sup>4</sup> They thought that the project had produced a lot of good suggestions and ideas that lead to decreased leaching. They also thought it was important to share knowledge between countries. At the start of the project there was a lot of knowledge that was not available in a particular country, but is now spread throughout a wider circle. The farmers interviewed also pointed out that it was difficult to invest in environment-improving measures, since the economic situation is tough for many. In the same study, many of the farmers interviewed thought that *"Production is almost totally governed by rules, not by professionalism and biological factors."* They also said that *"most of the pride in being a farmer has been taken away"*.

The farmers in Odling i Balans in Sweden reported that participating in the Baltic Deal network has contributed to increased knowledge of plant nutrient losses. *"On visits to other farms you see what others are doing and you can discuss on the ground how you can improve your use of the soil and animal rearing"*.

The majority of Swedish farmers were very positive about the use of demonstration farms to show best practice. It is important to have examples and initiatives in reality. *"The strength is when a group of farmers come together and discuss and question"*. It is particularly interesting when farmers' own convictions and practical experience are combined with those of experts, advisors or researchers. Another farmer pointed out: *"It is important to have knowledge translated into practical action and the farmer's eye can be used to see what is happening all the time. The visits to the demonstration farms are really interesting, unlike to visiting a trial, where you often just get a snapshot"*.

A Swedish advisory services researcher noted that more than looking and visiting a farm is often needed. *"There is a strong belief that once you have demonstrated new technology, it should be clear. It is more a question of how the visitors themselves reflect on how new knowledge can be applied on their own farm"*. The Polish experience is that it is an advantage to have an outsider who can process the visit and capture different experiences.

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<sup>4</sup>See [www.balticdeal.eu](http://www.balticdeal.eu)



*Figure 5. It is important to see, hear about and discuss different questions on farms. A visit to Norregården, one of the farms within the Baltic Deal network, in 2014. “The strength is when a group of farmers come together and discuss and question”, said one of the Odling i Balans farmers. Photo H. Jonsson*

The Polish farmers in the Baltic Deal network were asked where they acquired knowledge about the environment. The majority cited official advisors, but many also mentioned trade journals and the companies from which they bought seed, pesticides etc. Many also said that other farmers were a source of information.

## **FARMERS' MEETINGS**

There have been a number of activities and meetings in recent years. The contact network has also made it easier to exchange ideas and experiences between farms and countries. The focus on plant nutrient losses and different measures inspired the pilot farms to carry out further measures. A number demanded more knowledge of environmental issues among advisors.

The demonstration farms have been used to showcase the business, environmental measures and production for small and large groups of farmers. The primary focus has been on demonstrating specific environmental measures on a farm. In Figure 6, from a meeting in Poland, farmers are shown how to use different plants to prevent soil erosion.





*Figure 6. Demonstration on a demonstration farm in Chwałowice, Poland, in 2012. Professor M. Krysztoforski demonstrates different plants that can be used to prevent soil erosion. Photo: J. Fila.*

## QUALITATIVE STUDY TRIPS

For study trips to be qualitative and valuable, planning is needed. It is also important to choose farms carefully. The following criteria can provide guidance when demonstration farms are being selected:

- There is good collaboration with local advisors
- The farmer is prepared to share qualitative data about the farm and production
- The farm should be representative of the area, production forms and size
- Good position for receiving visitors
- The farmer should have implemented environmental measures that are interesting to demonstrate
- The farmer should be innovative and visionary
- The farmer should permit information to be published on the internet
- The farm and the business must be presentable to visitors, i.e. it must be clean and tidy.

There are a number of issues to consider and plan in advance before welcoming a study trip to a demonstration farm:

- The objective of the study trip and the feature to be demonstrated must be clear.
- It can be good to know the target group, their prior knowledge and what they expect from the visit.
- Think through the areas within the business that need to be discussed.
- An appropriate size for the group is 10-20 people. That provides opportunities for questions and dialogue and is a suitable size of group to talk to without technological aids.
- The visit should not be longer than 2-3 hours, preferably with a break to allow spontaneous discussions between the participants.
- Draw up careful instructions on how to get to the farm and circulate telephone numbers in case the unexpected occurs.
- Plan the practical details for the visit, such as access to toilets, parking places, and a place to gather in bad weather.
- Prepare a farm profile describing the farm, size, owner, employees, soil type, production figures, number of animals, water quality analyses if available, a description of nature around the farm, technical solutions that decrease environmental leaching, and whether there are special regulations and restrictions in the area. A map of the farm can be very valuable. Two pages of facts should be enough.

**The study trip may take the following structure:**

1. Welcome of all visitors.
2. Introduction.
3. Main message.
4. Economic aspects.
5. Summary.
6. Future visions and thoughts.

When welcoming visitors, it is good to mention the structure of the visit, where the toilets are, where drinking water can be found etc. If the trip also includes a visit to an animal house, then information should be provided about the infection control procedures that apply and where protective clothing can be found. It can also be good to inform visitors about any dangers on the farm, e.g. from operating machinery.

In the introduction, it is good to first describe the farm in general and then go on to the main message.

The main aim of the study trip is for farmers to hear about and see how one farm has resolved practical problems and found solutions to increase nutrient use efficiency and decrease losses to the environment. The financial savings in increasing nutrient use efficiency should be explained, and also the value for the environment and society of decreased losses to the environment.

There are a number of successful examples from Poland and Sweden of advisory services and farmers working within the same catchment area, in respectively country. An example from Poland in



which advisory services in the catchment area were improved proved to be very successful. Farmers became aware of the relationship between leaching from farms in the catchment area and the status of the environment. The meeting with farmers was then developed into a strong driving force to find measures that decrease leaching.

Financial aspects are always interesting to visiting farmers. It can be advantageous to produce sample calculations that can be presented on the visit to show what different investments cost.

Summary and conclusion. It can be a good idea at the end of the visit to bring the group of visitors together to find out whether there are any questions. It can also be appropriate to set aside time for a discussion at the end. There are different cultures in the countries around the Baltic Sea about discussing production, finances and the environment openly in a group. The important thing is how to meet people in a positive way for create good dialogue. There are also different aims and tips developed in the Baltic Deal Bridge project on how to create a successful discussion. See [www.balticdeal.eu](http://www.balticdeal.eu) for more information on this.

To create a successful study visit, there is a need for trust, honesty and respect for different opinions and experiences between all participating parties. When these ingredients are in place, this paves the way for a successful exchange between farmers and advisors within countries and between countries. We have great hopes that this network will be one of the components contributing to better status in the Baltic Sea.



*Figure 7. The entire study visit needs to be planned and thought through in advance. A group of 10-20 people is often enough to handle on a study visit. This group size gave the visitors in the pictures a chance to ask questions and have a discussion and they were able to fit under the veranda roof when the rain came. Pictures from a visit in 2012 to Wojciech Pysiak, one of the Baltic Deal demonstration farms in Poland. Photo: M. Krysztoforski.*

## SHOWING IMPROVEMENTS IN NUMBERS

We know that awareness leads to change, but the question is how to demonstrate that. In the survey of farmers, a number requested more concrete and clear evidence that a measure has an effect. Sometimes conflicting information is provided and therefore farmers want to see improvements with their own eyes. Drawing up plant nutrient balances and calculating plant nutrient use is a way to

monitor developments on a farm. Relating losses to what is produced on the farm can be another valuable way of evaluating a production enterprise. Calculating and estimating losses in different ways could well be complemented with measurements, for example in some water courses.

## **FUTURE NEEDS**

Knowledge creation is an important component in decreasing leaching and optimising fertiliser use. Finding the right fertiliser level is a challenge. It is essential to plan fertilisation according to requirements and to obtain information on the nutrient content of manure and slurry, so that mineral fertiliser can be used as a complement to meet crop requirement. One of the difficulties is in determining nitrogen mineralisation from the soil so that an appropriate fertiliser dose can be calculated. Documentation on use and follow-up analyses are an important part of environmentally friendly fertilisation. If there is manure or slurry available on the farm, it should be applied using a good method at the right time and to the right crop. Any mineral fertiliser applied should be regarded as a complement. Plant nutrient balances are a good tool for assessing nitrogen and phosphorus- use. They can be calculated in different ways. It would be beneficial to have a standard method that all countries used. That would make it easier to calculate the potential for improvement. Another uncertainty factor is the amount of nitrogen fixed by nitrogen fixing crops. It depends largely on the proportion of nitrogen-fixing crops grown and their yield.

In the survey of farmers on islands around the Baltic Sea, many claimed that they have already done what they can. They believed that their own country already has resource-efficient production and that it would be more effective to implement measures in another area. However, a number of the farmers were interested in learning more about how to decrease plant nutrient losses. Swedish farmers generally have a good level of agricultural education and high environmental awareness. In the survey of Swedish farmers, they still believed that a large proportion of Swedish farmers did not know about measures to decrease nutrient losses. One must never forget that knowledge has a “best before date” and it is important to continually stay updated.

On the issue of whether farmers involved in the network should receive financial compensation, opinion differed. Some thought that they should of course be compensated, but others pointed out that the environment and farm finances go hand in hand and that it is profitable to take part in such a project. Preparing for a visit at the farm is time consuming for the farmer. Even when the farm already is in good order, it will take between half to one day to prepare for the visit. Moreover the visit will also consist for some hours. About 90% of the farmers both in Sweden and in Poland considered that there is a need to be compensated financially as a demonstration farm. Another way to compensate the farmers is to have access to the latest information about good farming practices or to be provided with equipment that can be used for measuring in the soil or crop.

Some of the work with the demonstration farms was to increase knowledge and collect data. The next step is to convert that knowledge into practice. It is important to have a good relationship with advisors and researchers in order to devise different alternatives.

The network of demonstration farms around the Baltic Sea is good for exchanging experiences on how best to achieve the target of a healthier Baltic Sea. For example, one can compare the relative advantages and disadvantages of legislation and advice and determine the best option for a particular time and place. This may require different approaches and tools, depending on history, politics and experiences. It is important to have an open eye to different tools and approaches.