



THIS PROJECT HAS RECEIVED FUNDING FROM
THE EUROPEAN UNION'S HORIZON 2020 RESEARCH
AND INNOVATION PROGRAMME UNDER GRANT
AGREEMENT N. 772705



Deliverable 5.4

Set of reports originating from the collective learning within the cross-reflection process





Document Summary

Deliverable Title: **Set of reports originating from the collective learning within the cross-reflection process**

Version: 1

Deliverable Lead: WR

Related Work package: WP5

Author(s): Ellen Bulten, Delphine Neumeister, Herman Schoorlemmer, Laure Triste, Cynthia Giagnocavo

Contributor(s): Ellen Bulten, Delphine Neumeister, Herman Schoorlemmer, Laure Triste, Cynthia Giagnocavo

Communication level: **PU Public**

Project Number: **7727053**

Grant Agreement Number: **7727053**

Programme: **NEFERTITI**

Start date of Project: **January, 12, 2018**

Duration: **4 years (+ 9 months extension)**

Project coordinator: **Adrien Guichaoua**

Abstract

NEFERTITI Programme promotes the creation of interactive thematic networks related to the agriculture sector to promote knowledge, learning and the adoption of innovative techniques through the exchange of information between different actors and live demonstrations..



Table of contents

1 Introduction	5
1.1 Background objective	6
1.2 Objective	6
1.3 Methods and data collection	6
1.4 Reading guide.....	7
2 Collective learning within NEFERTITI	8
2.1 Collective learning in the networks	9
2.2 Collective learning through the cross visits	10
2.3 Collective learning within the hubs	12
3 Practical lessons as outcomes of collective learning.....	15
3.1 Training soft skills	16
3.2 Virtual demos: bottlenecks, opportunities and when to use as Plan A.....	18
3.3 Collaboration in organising a demo.....	21
4 Conclusion.....	24

NEFERTITI

Networking European Farms to Enhance Cross Fertilisation and Innovation Uptake through Demonstration



1

Introduction

NEFERTITI 



1 Introduction

1.1 Background objective

The process of uptake, adoption and scaling of sustainable innovations and the speed of this process is crucial in the development of an innovative and sustainable European agriculture. Well-organised farm demos, like those in the NEFERTITI network, are important drivers in this process. To stimulate the organisation of farm demos, 10 interactive thematic networks with a thematic network leader have been created in NEFERTITI, bringing together 45 regional clusters (hubs) of demo-farmers. Each hub is guided by a hub coach.

The overall goal of Work Package 5 is to improve the impact of these farm demos. This is done by fostering peer-to-peer learning on demo-farms, boosting knowledge absorption and stimulating collective learning. To achieve this overall goal, WP5 created and facilitated monitoring & evaluation of both regional learning processes and interregional knowledge exchange within demonstration networks of NEFERTITI. The activities inspire and catalyse the acceleration of (mutual) cognitive, social and institutional learning processes, as well as horizontal knowledge flows between peers.

The Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) approach and tools created and used within NEFERTITI have been described in Deliverables 5.1 and 5.2. In D5.3 the first analysis results have been described about carrying out effective demo activities on-farm. These lessons, separated in wins, hurdles, emerging questions and testimonies, were based on an analysis of the Hub Monitoring & Evaluation Journals, which all 45 NEFERTITI hubs filled in during the first NEFERTITI demo year.

1.2 Objective of the deliverable report

The objective of this Deliverable 5.4 is to fuel and deepen the results of the first analysis in D5.3 based on additional analysis and number of collective learning events. This additional analysis is related to: 1) emerging questions described in D5.3; 2) learning questions as posed by the hub coaches in the Hub M&E Journal and 3) additional questions and issues that arose during the Annual Meetings and the progress of the project.

Important lessons and reflections that will be discussed in this deliverable are focused on:

- Learning within NEFERTITI as a whole, in the thematic networks, within the hubs and through cross visits: What activities, content, settings and structures are effective and could be recommended to other projects?
- Softs skills: what skills are needed and could be trained to organise and facilitate demos?
- Virtual demos: In which situations are virtual or hybrid demos good alternatives or even the best option compared to on-farm demos? Why?
- Collaboration in organising a demo: How can collaboration improve the quality of a demo event?

Results of D5.4 will feed into D5.5, which will cover recommendations on how to utilise these approaches and lessons for demo-farms in various countries of the EU, supporting the implementation of EIP-AGRI, related to the dynamics of the advisory and education systems in the EU.

1.3 Methods and collected data

The sources and interventions used in the deliverable are:

- 1) D5.3 First set of monitoring reports on carrying out effective demo-activities on-farm based on the Hub



M&E journals of 45 hub coaches. It was based on the demo campaign of 2019.

- 2) The second set of monitoring reports of the NEFERTITI demo campaign of 2020.
- 3) The results and minutes of the NEFERTITI Annual Meeting 2021 in which:
 - a) Hub coaches discussed lessons learned on farm demonstrations and lessons learned from participating in the thematic network of NEFERTITI;
 - b) Hub coaches learned and discussed the ORID framework for detailed reflection and learning;
 - c) A session was organised in which in 10 parallel groups the hub coaches were asked to develop a 'fictive' exciting life demo on a commercial farm.
- 4) An additional survey, conducted in autumn 2021, among the 45 hub coaches on on-farm and virtual demos to validate results and test and validate initial hunches based on previous results.
- 5) The results and minutes of the winter meeting in December 2021 with the 10 thematic network leaders. During the meeting a collective learning session was facilitated on training in soft skills, virtual demos and learning in networks.

1.4 Reading guide

In Chapter 2, lessons learned are described about collective learning in NEFERTITI. The chapter is split into three parts: 1) collective learning in the networks; 2) collective learning through cross-visits; and 3) collective learning within the hubs. In Chapter 3, more practical lessons learned are described as outcomes of the collective learning experiences: 1) training soft skills; 2) virtual demos: bottlenecks, opportunities and when to use as Plan A; and 3) collaboration in organising a demo. Finally, Chapter 4 is a concluding chapter including recommendations for future projects and demo networks.



2

Collective learning within NEFERTITI





2. Collective learning within NEFERTITI

This section aims to explain, evaluate and reflect upon the collaborative learning processes that took place in NEFERTITI. Collective learning will be discussed on three levels: learning between the NEFERTITI thematic networks, collective learning through the cross visits and collective learning within the hubs.

2.1 Collective learning in the networks

Description of the approach used in NEFERTITI

To stimulate and organise demos within the context of NEFERTITI, 10 interactive thematic networks with a thematic network leader were created, bringing together 45 regional clusters (hubs) of demo-farmers. Figure 1 outlines the 10 thematic networks within NEFERTITI. The networks were organised at EU level and connected 4 or 5 regional/national hubs per network, constituting a cross-border multi-actor interactive network of demo-farms and innovation actors from several EU countries who all worked on the same topic/challenge. In the networks, hub coaches exchanged practical oriented knowledge, best practises and relevant innovations but also knowledge and experience about how to effectively organise demo events. The figure below provides an overview of all 10 NEFERTITI thematic networks. This section describes lessons learned about collective learning in network settings.

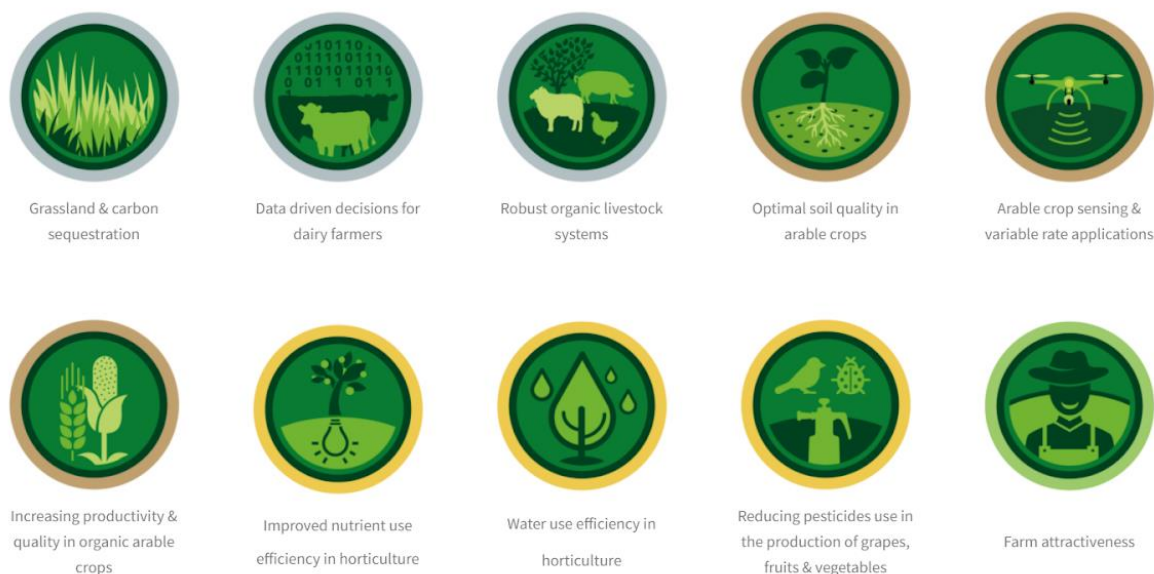


Figure 1 The 10 thematic networks within NEFERTITI

Network meetings as important sources for learning

When asked about the most important sources for learning, hub coaches most often mentioned other colleagues (this includes other hub coaches) (23), followed by network meetings (15) in a survey. Thematic network meetings thus were an important source of learning for hub coaches within NEFERTITI. When asked about the advantages of participating in a thematic network, hub coaches mention:

- Exchange of both *best practices* as well as *bad experiences* between countries;
- *Sharing experience and knowledge* with other network participants to improve demo events results;
- In many networks, exchange of ideas on technical parts is not the most important, but rather exchange on *soft skills*, e.g. about methods for interaction, facilitation, etc.;
- *Team building* within the network, which leads to more collaboration and interaction between members;



- A *storyboard method* that was introduced and facilitated in each network;
- Learning about *similar problems* that are shared across many EU countries (and finding generic solutions).

This list of advantages of participating in a network shows that networks can play an important role in stimulating knowledge exchange and accelerating skill development of demo organisers.

Recommendations on using networks as learning environments

Although experiences differ between networks, thematic network leaders came up with two general *recommendations* to other projects that can be taken into account when working on demos in network settings. Firstly, it is important to *build confidence and trust* within the network and to provide room for all members of a network to share their experiences. Engaging network members to share opinions, tips, tricks, solutions and struggles should happen on 2 topics: 1) demo organisation (*process* side of organising demos); and 2) technical solutions and farming issues, e.g. weed management in organic crops (*content* side of organising demos). A second recommendation is about the *role of the thematic network leader*. This role should be interpreted more as facilitator and not as 'chief' of the network. In practice, this means engaging people by asking them to share testimonials and avoiding 'competition' between farming systems within the same network.

Though network meetings are mentioned as an important source for learning and network leaders came up with recommendations for other projects, network leaders and hub coaches also mentioned *difficulties* associated with working in networks. As one hub coach mentioned: "*Sometimes I wonder about the purpose of our activities. For sure, we are strengthening our networks, but is our network making an impact in terms of farm attractiveness [thematic 10]?*". Other difficulties of running a network include:

- Lack of time to dedicate to the monitoring of the network and to involve hub coaches. How far should the network leader's involvement go? Within NEFERTITI a Dynamic Action Plan for each network was introduced to deal with this, but such tools can easily feel like an extra administrative burden and therefore not be used optimally;
- The value of the network differed per network, where some hub coaches mentioned that they did not get much value out of the meetings, especially when the network did not meet regularly or if there was little effort put in to work as a team;
- Follow up after meeting - difficulties with achieving continuity in the meetings.

Practical tips that network leaders shared during a winter meeting to improve working and learning within networks include organising regular monthly meetings, inviting guest speakers from each country involved in the network, initiating collaboration within the network and sharing responsibilities across the network.

2.2 Collective learning through cross visits

Description of the approach used in NEFERTITI

Demonstration cross-visits are demo events organised between national/regional hubs of a given thematic network, allowing hub coaches and demo-farmers from a hub to visit and exchange with their counterparts in other countries during demonstration days. Usually, cross-visits are organised as follows: one or two days of demos (preferably on a real demo day organised for local farmers and not specifically for the EU visitors), followed by a debriefing and evaluation session in the end to analyse what worked well and what could be improved. A set of observation cards is divided between the participants at the beginning of the cross-visits. These cards are topic or demonstration cards, in which targeted questions regarding the topic or organisation of the demo are addressed. Each participant has to think about the question written on the card he received and give their feedback at the end of the cross-visit during the debriefing session. This session is supposed to help the organisers of demo events to reflect on their own practises and experiences.

NEFERTITI has so far organised two campaigns of cross-visits. The 2020 Covid-19 crisis did not allow the networks to travel through Europe to meet. However, after overcoming difficulties to organise cross visits in



pandemic times, most of the networks realised cross visits in 2021 as scheduled in the projects' grant agreement. A last campaign is scheduled for 2022.

Evaluation of the cross visits by the hub coaches

This section is mainly based on the cross-visits reports that were produced by the hub coaches and the WP5 facilitators. All the cross-visit reports lead to one main conclusion: cross visits are very satisfying for farmers and network participants in general. They find it productive to visit other farming systems and demos and to discover other countries' habits and practises. Cross-visits videos provided within NEFERTITI also testify of the participants' interest in the cross-visits and the curiosity they raise: *"I find that these types of breeds improve grazing and ultimately economic results"*, *"what struck me was the nursing cows, the work life balance of the farmers with only once a day milking and the excellent efficient and low-cost system"*, *"I was impressed by the way they include farmers in their project"*. Participants also find it interesting to observe that they are facing similar problems in many other EU countries and that generic solutions may exist in some situations. All cross-visits in 2021 fulfilled more than the minimum quality conditions regarding the number of foreign participants, and the balance between participating farmers, advisors and researchers. They also showed strong documentation (posters, photos, videos, reports) and showed innovative demo cases relevant for most of the cross visitors.

Direct contacts are key to keep the network together. The cross visits were very efficient to create a group spirit: one hub coach pointed out that farmers changed the way they interacted and worked after the cross visit. Moreover, travelling to another country forces everyone to be open-minded and broaden their points of view. Moreover, the cross-visits contributed to the knowledgeability of NEFERTITI among participants and participating organisations in the hosting countries, which might continue after the end of the project.

Further, the effort made by the organisational team on social activities are usually very appreciated by the participants and very beneficial for learning as it contributes to creating a safe space for participants in which they are more willing to share and contribute to discussions. To create a friendly and relaxed atmosphere, it is important to dedicate sufficient time to ice breaking and social events, as they offer participants the possibility of speaking informally and to exchange. Also other informal moments (walks or bus transfer between two demos, cocktails etc.) are key for peer-to-peer learning, as long as everyone can understand each other.

Translation issues are the main barrier to learning during cross visits. As many farmers do not speak foreign languages, live translation had to be organised. Sometimes this was done, sometimes it was not. Cross visit reports are clear regarding this issue: participants' perceptions about the cross visits were more positive when translation was properly organised. Dedicated time for translation should also be taken into account during the demo evaluation session, as it should enable everyone who took part in the cross visit to share their opinion.

Cross visits illustrate a large diversity of demo events: local field days open to a large audience, dedicated farm visits only for the cross-visit group, national fairs, etc. One part of the cross-visits was dedicated to the evaluation of the visited demo event. The aim was to include the demo organisers in this session, so they would also be able to learn. However, cross-visits that visited existing national demo events sometimes struggled to invite or reach the event organisers to give them tips for improvement, because the event organisers were very busy at that moment with the organisation of the demo. Moreover, they were not always open to the suggestions from the cross-visit participants, because the event organisation was built on long lasting traditions.

Notwithstanding that cross visits are appreciated, a lack of participating farmers (local, international or both) was systematically noticed within NEFERTITI, whereas they should be the dominant target group. The lack of female farmers is of even greater concern: for instance in 2021 cross visits, there were only 5 female farmers among the 38 farmers who attended a cross visit. Even if reasons for this lack of farmers haven't been specifically mentioned in the reports, we may infer that language issues and time constraints are the main barriers to foreign farmers' participation. Regarding the local farmers' participation, ways to improve have been specified in some cross visits reports. Indeed, participants to cross visits noted the importance of identifying a very clear purpose for the day, as it helps to focus on a specific topic. Consequently, the target group is also better identified and interested farmers are more likely to participate in the demo.



Attractiveness to participate in cross-visits for policy makers and administration representatives has shown disappointing results. Unfortunately, most of the cross visits had trouble to associate or host policy makers and managing authorities to the cross visits. In the 2021 cross visit campaign, only 3 policy makers or administration representatives participated out of a total of 109 cross visitors. They should be more involved, especially in cases where there is still a need to promote on-farm demo events for funding. Indeed all events have been focussed on the farming community as target group only, while the dominant lines of conflict and the driving forces for innovation in most of the countries actually are linked to civil society: animal welfare, biodiversity, resource use, land use, climate change, water quality.

Feedback and demo evaluation for peer-to-peer learning, strong cross fertilisation and learning across language barriers and across different target groups have had a positive impact on the learnings of the participants of the different visiting hubs. The reflection process based on observation cards and evaluation during the cross visit was very relevant for the participants but also the monitors of the demo evaluation. Indeed the observation cards offered even to shy people the opportunity to express their idea about a specific angle of the cross visit. As most of the cross visits involved more than one demo, it was not always easy to define the perimeter of the reflection. In order to be more efficient some groups worked in subgroups to deal with the different demos in parallel, others used the world café method to enable everyone to have a look at everything.

Some networks experimented with co-organisation between networks (2) or through borders (1) and found the results were positive: not only is peer- to- peer learning possible between countries, but also between different thematic areas.

What can future projects learn from the NEFERTITI experience

In a nutshell, main lessons learnt thanks to the cross-visits are as follows:

- Cross-visits are beneficial for tightening the networks and creating group spirit. They also increase the knowledgeability of the project in the hosting countries. A specific topic helps to attract local farmers to participate.
- Participation of farmers has to be facilitated. Language issues as well as their capacity to leave their farm work for several days are definitely barriers to be removed to involve more farmers in the cross-visit. In addition, farmer participation often involves a significant dedication of their time. It would be useful if some sort of remuneration for their time was made available.
- More focus is to be given to the participation of policy makers and administration representatives in order to show them the importance of demo events and peer to peer exchanges.
- Social and informal activities are key to create a nice atmosphere for participants to exchange. Cross-visits in general have a positive impact on the learning of the visiting participants (foreigners and locals).
- Evaluation contributed to the learnings of the cross-visits and evaluation tools can help all participants to contribute to the evaluation and formulation of lessons learned. It is hard to have an impact on the demo organisers during the cross visit.
- Cross fertilisation by cooperating cross borders and cooperating with other networks should be stimulated.

2.3 Collective learning within the hubs

Description of the approach used in NEFERTITI

The ten NEFERTITI thematic networks are divided into national hubs. Organised at a regional level, a hub is a group of several demo-farms working on a given topic/challenge, connected to relevant innovation actors (farmers, advisors, education, NGOs, researchers, industry and managing authorities, etc). In the hubs, links are established between all these actors to improve both the demo activities themselves and the knowledge flows. The aim is to inspire new ideas to be taken up by farmers or, on the other way around, by all other relevant actors. The hubs represent the key elements of the NEFERTITI network's structure and demonstration actions, as all demo activities were organised in these structured and multi-actor/multi-stakeholder hubs. The



first year of the project was devoted to the hub construction, whereas the following years were dedicated to the organisation of demo events (hub campaigns) in the hub’s farms.

Hub campaigns as well as cross visits or network activities suffered from the Covid19 crisis, with the consequence of many scheduled events being cancelled or postponed. However, most hubs managed to reach NEFERTITI goals by organising the total number of demos planned. Overall, networks have managed to maintain a number of events despite the Covid crisis, achieving online participation of farmers and balance between virtual and physical demos.

Evaluation of the hubs by the hub coaches

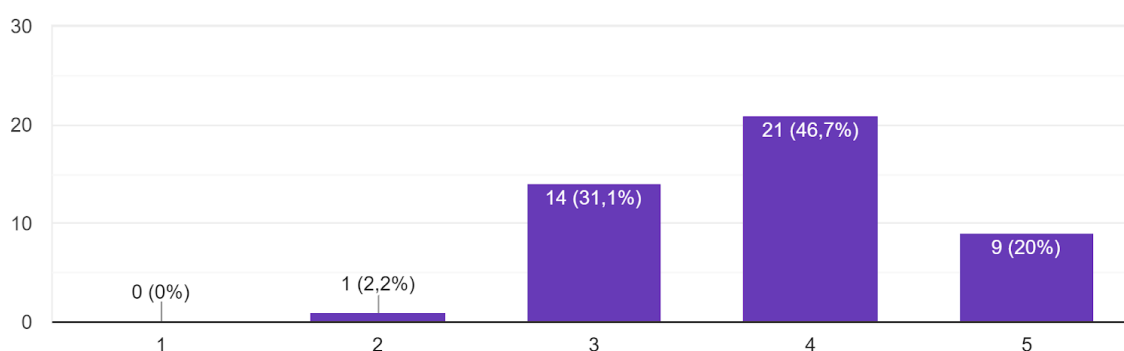
This section is mainly based on the hub-journals that were produced by the hub coaches at the end of each demo campaign (2019, 2020, 2021).

Creating regular demos within a long-term group and improving knowledge integration is not always easy to achieve regarding the availability of hub members. Keeping farmers motivated to participate in a group is also another challenge. Efforts should be made to attract new farmers, for instance by organising *“more events this coming year and outside events to ensure we get engagement”* or *“keeping the events coming and be aware there are still many people who have not yet had the message so plenty of learning to be made available”*. In addition, extending the target audience to consumers and policy makers is a difficult task that all hubs have to face.

In most hub journals, it could be observed that campaign and demo objectives are more specific (*“Setting the objectives was done in a better way than last year”*), but still focused on agronomy or technical content and not on the process of organising a demo event or learning outcomes (e.g., raise awareness on carbon sequestration, support existing networks on precision dairy farming, show good practises for reducing pesticides, etc.). In the course of NEFERTITI, hub coaches paid more attention to the goal definition of their demos. The following figure shows that among the 45 persons who answered the survey question, 30 agreed or fully agreed to have improved clear goal definition, 14 were neutral about it and only one person disagreed.

During NEFERTITI, I improved clear goal definition for my demo event

45 antwoorden



Choosing the topic of the demo with the hub farmers proved to be very powerful to have the farmers participate in the demos: *“The objectives and target group were clear so it was easy to find interesting topics and make the program”*. Choosing a topic for the demos in a participatory way increases the effectiveness of the demos, because they better fit their expectations. Some hub coaches have also become less ambitious (but also more realistic) in the number of topics tackled during one demo: *“it is better to have less topics but to cover them well and to ensure discussion”*.

It is essential to rely on farmers to ensure the success of a demo. As sharing knowledge is central to the NEFERTITI process, peer-to-peer exchange has to be the key of any demo. In the survey, 41/45 hub coaches



confirmed that they pay more attention to peer-to-peer interaction during a demo and 35/45 hub coaches (fully) agree on the fact that the quality of their demos improved during the course of the project (see section 3.1 for more details).

For all hubs, evaluation and follow up seem to be an issue at stake, especially for larger demos. It is seen as a very difficult but mandatory step to 1) further improve the quality of the demos and 2) prove to policy makers the effectiveness of successful demos. Most of the hub coaches agree on the fact that more monitoring would be a great idea: *“Usually the online events work well... but we need more monitoring!”* ; *“More engaged feedback by an organised activity would probably be better”*. This activity needs a dedicated time and is often treated on the second plane. *“Feedback is hard to get sometimes as during the event people are busy and then they want to leave quickly so leaving it to the end is also difficult”*. Some tools are already identified to be a great help in the process (mentimeter, klaxoon, online questionnaire after webinars or field days which makes the collection of feedback very easy...) but often remain quite superficial and based on “hot reactions”. Indeed, most of the evaluations carried out so far are done directly at the end of the demo, but not sometime after the demo to identify potential change in practice or what the farmers remember from the demo. The hub journal's analysis shows that it is hard to fit in time for evaluation on a shorter and longer term. In the hub journals some hub coaches suggested ideas to improve the monitoring aspects: for instance monitoring during the demo could be left to people other than the organisers as they have too much to do during the demo event or to delegate the monitoring to a dedicated person. Monitoring after the demo could be tackled during dedicated meetings to review the event with the main organisers.

Some hubs started working together with other hubs, for instance by co-organising demo events of cross visits. This kind of collaboration appeared to be *“very useful, efficient and valuable”*. This kind of cooperation and “team up” with other networks in the same country could be an interesting way of pursuing exchanges on demo events after NEFERTITI ends .

Finally, the NEFERTITI guidelines ([see link to the training kit here](#)) appeared to be a useful tool for the hub coaches, especially the demo checklist and the online facilitation training. Some hub coaches transferred the training kit to colleagues not involved in NEFERTITI but in charge of the organisation of demo events.

What can future projects learn from the NEFERTITI experience

- Regularity in organising demonstrations may foster farmers' involvement in the hub. A precise topic also is more attractive to farmers than a wide one.
- Peer to peer exchange is essential and has to be the central point of the demo. To foster peer to peer exchange, the soft skills of the facilitator and the format of the demo are crucial.
- Evaluation is a difficult but mandatory step to further improve the quality and the impact of a demo. User-friendly and effective methods to improve ex-post evaluation still need to be found.
- Cooperation between hubs is a powerful way to maintain a dynamic within the hubs and widen the opportunities for exchange and learning. The participation of on-farm demo organisers of other projects and initiatives for an ongoing demo network building should be encouraged, in order to keep the NEFERTITI momentum going after the project.

Relevant guidelines to support demo organisation and facilitation are available on the [farm demo platform](#).



3

Practical lessons as outcomes of collective learning



3 Practical lessons as outcomes of collective learning

This session is dedicated to describing the outcomes of this learning process and explore the lessons learned. While Deliverable 5.3 describes in greater detail a number of lessons and practical tips and tricks, this Chapter focuses on three lessons that proved to be important ways to improve the quality of demos.

3.1 Training soft skills

Networks within NEFERTITI are centred around 10 thematic areas, where hubs exchange knowledge through demonstrations to boost innovation uptake. Learning and facilitating are crucial for successful transfer and exchange of knowledge during demonstration events, as also recognised in the FarmDemo Training kit. Throughout the NEFERTITI project, hub coaches reflected on their experiences, and facilitating knowledge exchange proved to be a difficult task for many hub coaches, who are often very knowledgeable about and experienced in the *thematic contents* of the demo event, but are less experienced in skills such as facilitation.

In a survey (n=45), we asked all hub coaches to name the three most important skills that farm demo organisers should be trained in in order to organise successful demos. See also Table 1. The three skills most often mentioned in this survey were facilitation skills (22), communication skills (12) and general organisation skills (11). Other often-mentioned important skills are time management (9) and public speaking and presentation (7). The list is completed with other 'soft' skills totalling to 24 skills mentioned by the hub coaches. This is an interesting result as it shows that demo organisers consider 'soft' or 'interpersonal' skills as crucial skills in order to organise successful demo events and therefore the most important skills that demo organisers should be trained in.

Table 1 Top 3 qualitative outcomes of survey about learning and skills for demo events

Response	Number of responses (out of 45)
What was your most important source for learning about organising demo events?	
Other colleagues (including other hub coaches)*	23
Network meetings	15
NEFERTITI training kit	10
What are the 3 most important skills farm demo organisers should be trained in?	
Facilitation	22
Communication	12
Organisation (general)	11



*Some of these exchanges likely took place in network meetings, but this was not always specified

NEFERTITI is centred around the idea that farmers learn from other farmers. Similarly, demo organisers can learn from each other via a 'train-the-trainer' approach to improve their soft skills, as suggested during interactive sessions in Annual Meetings and meetings between network leaders. One way to do this is by pairing an experienced demo organiser with strong facilitation and soft skills to a less experienced and/or less strong demo organiser for example in a mentoring construct. Assessment or Peer 2 Peer mentoring sessions are another way to implement the train the trainer approach. A more general recommendation is to give soft skills the same priority as technical skills. Within NEFERTITI we have centred the hubs and networks around thematic (technical) areas, resulting in hub coaches who are highly trained and knowledgeable on the technical (or *content*) parts of demos, but often without matching experience in soft skills such as facilitation (the *process* part of a demo). Soft skills or interpersonal skills should be given the same priority as technical skills when preparing a demo event, but also when training (prospective) demo organisers. Soft skills can therefore also take a more prominent role in curricula of agricultural educational programmes.

Improving skills through tools and experience

When asked about important sources for learning about organising demo events, hub coaches most often mention other colleagues (23), network meetings (15) and the FarmDemo training kit (10). Tools can play an important role in training soft skills. Hub coaches and network leaders mention that simple checklists of important soft skills and reminders about how to facilitate exchange are already helpful. The NEFERTITI training kit, as an important open source for hub coaches, also provides overviews of learning methods, practical (group) reflection tools and guidelines for communication during demo events. All these tools support demo organisers in effectively facilitating and using soft skills during demo events. Tools focused on facilitation methods and guidance are particularly important, as facilitation skills are the most important skill mentioned by demo organisers. Role play can be used as a more elaborate and collaborative tool to learn soft skills. Other specific tools or methods that hub coaches mentioned as useful to improve soft skills are simple checklists or documents outlining the structure for an interactive meeting, concrete methods such as storyboards that help in the preparation of a demo and methods that can be used during the demo such as concrete icebreaker approaches. Within NEFERTITI, checklists and guidelines were provided and used to prepare, carry-out and evaluate a demo event. Such tools for example included guidance for specifying the demo objective or guidelines for group reflection. More elaborate methods such as storytelling can also be used to improve facilitation and interaction during demos. Within NEFERTITI, a storyboard exercise was carried out where hub coaches visually planned a (virtual) demo event using a storyboard (e.g. using PowerPoint or drawings with pencils on paper). The purpose of using storytelling and story boards within NEFERTITI was to disseminate information more effectively through better communication and design of the demo event.

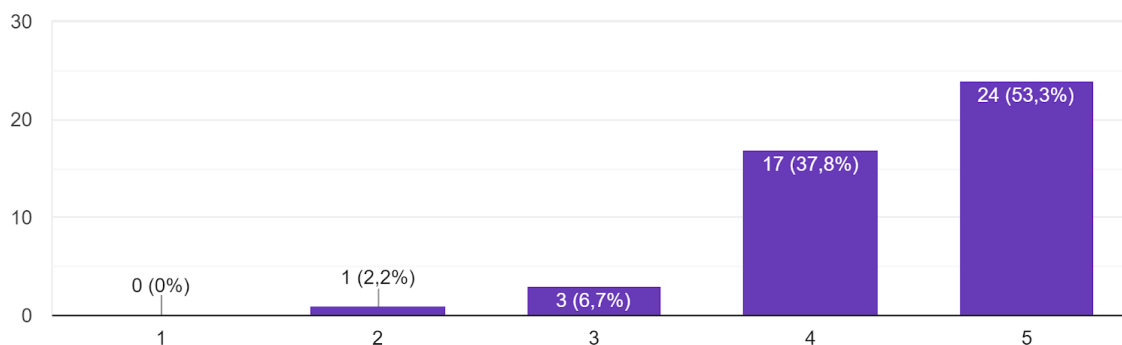
For online demos, specific tools to facilitate online interaction are useful. During NEFERTITI, many hub coaches used chat functions of digital platforms (e.g. MS Teams, Zoom) to facilitate interaction, but also platforms such as Miro, Jamboard or MentiMeter. However, most of these platforms only provide a space that a demo organiser still needs to arrange and facilitate in a way to encourage peer-to-peer exchange. Therefore, in the case of virtual demos more and different tools may be used compared to on-farm demos.

Lastly, an important finding is that purely being involved in NEFERTITI as a demo organiser improved (facilitation of) peer-to-peer exchange as well. In the survey, hub coaches indicated that they pay more (17) or a lot more (24) attention to peer-to-peer exchange during a demo because of their involvement in NEFERTITI. Moreover, for most hub coaches during NEFERTITI their demos improved (20) or improved a lot (15) in terms of peer-to-peer interaction. For a minority (9), the quality of demos in terms of peer-to-peer interaction stayed the same during NEFERTITI. Another positive finding is that a large majority of demo organisers indicated that facilitation of peer-to-peer exchange improved (21) or improved a lot (14) during their involvement in NEFERTITI. These statistics, together with the fact that other colleagues (including other hub coaches within the NEFERTITI network) are an important source for learning and improving demos (23) indicate that learning communities and networks as used within NEFERTITI are an effective way to improve soft skills for demo organisation and demo organisation in general.



Because of my involvement in NEFERTITI as a demo organiser, I pay more attention to peer-to-peer interaction during a demo

45 antwoorden



3.2 Virtual demos: bottlenecks, opportunities and when to use as a Plan A

In 2020, hub coaches in NEFERTITI switched from organising on-farm demos to virtual demos, as necessitated by the COVID19 crisis. While this was initially a difficult hurdle and required a big change of plans, it also allowed hub coaches and the project as a whole to learn about effectively organising virtual demos. These lessons remain important even in post-COVID restriction times, as virtual settings are likely to remain now that demo participants have all gotten used to it and experienced both the pros and cons of virtual settings.

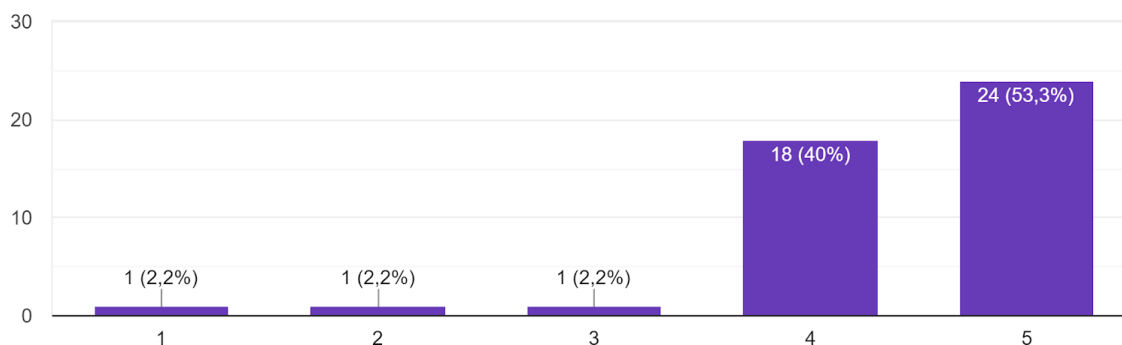
Disadvantages of virtual demos

An important **bottleneck** of virtual demos is that virtual settings allow for limited (informal) interaction. In their M&E Journals, hub coaches already reflected on the importance of informal exchange for peer-to-peer learning. In the survey (n=45), hub coaches judge informal exchanges (such as drinks, breaks, walking from A to B) as very important (24) or important (18) for peer-to-peer learning during demos. Lack of informal exchanges are therefore a major downside to virtual demo settings. Virtual settings also cannot replace the 'togetherness' and group dynamics of on-farm demos. When discussing pros and cons of virtual demos, hub coaches mentioned decreased peer-to-peer exchange and related issues such as lack of body-language as most challenging. This also becomes clear in practical issues such as the issue that in virtual settings only one person can talk simultaneously and people tend to be more hesitant to speak in virtual settings compared to in-person settings. This largely hinders more spontaneous discussion, although in many cases a chat function can be a good alternative and sometimes even a rich source of peer-to-peer interaction. Nevertheless, the general feeling is that virtual settings make it a lot more difficult to facilitate peer-to-peer exchange.



How important are informal exchanges (e.g. drinks, breaks, walking from A to B) for peer-to-peer learning during the demos you organised

45 antwoorden



Another bottleneck of virtual demos is that it is not possible to use senses during these demos. In the survey, some hub coaches indicate that especially when discussing specific topics like soil health, the demo is a lot more educational when participants can for example feel the soil. Of course, visuals are still possible and widely used during virtual demos, but other senses (touching, smelling, etc.) are eliminated, which hinders learning about the topic at hand.

Overall, technological bottlenecks (e.g. failing internet connections) are another important downside to virtual demos. Specifically in remote areas with bad internet connections or bandwidths, the options to use videos, visuals, or tools for interaction are very limited. This very much decreases the value of virtual alternatives as alternatives for on-farm demonstrations.

Opportunities of virtual demos

There are also positive aspects to virtual settings for demo events and even instances where virtual demos may be the preferred approach.

A first major advantage is that virtual demos can be more inclusive compared to on-farm demos. In the survey (see also Figure 3), around half of the hub coaches indicated that their virtual demos were more inclusive (17) or a lot more inclusive (6) compared to on-farm demos. 17 hub coaches mentioned that their virtual demos were neither more nor less inclusive than on-farm demos. For those demo events that were more inclusive, there was mainly a better representation of remote populations (24) and/or better representation of young farmers (18). It also seemed easier to attract new entrants to attend virtual demos.

Another strength of virtual demos compared to on-farm demos is a lower threshold to participate. This lower threshold is mainly due to elimination of obstacles in time and place (e.g. no travelling time or ability to attend a demo while watching children). This allowed virtual demo organisers to reach a broader geographical audience, including international.

Finally, some smaller opportunities have to do with circumstances and technicalities: virtual demos are not hindered by weather or seasonal changes, it is easier to include a larger number and diversity of speakers and it is easier to organise virtual demos when there is a large audience.



Table 2 Top qualitative outcomes of survey about virtual demos

Response	Number of responses (out of 45)
Strengths of virtual demos compared to physical demos	
Low threshold to participate*	13
Broader geographical reach (including international)	5
What are bottlenecks of virtual demos compared to on-farm demos?	
Lower quality of discussion and engagement	11
Lack of informal exchange	10
Technological bottlenecks**	8

*Mainly due to elimination of obstacles around time and place, but also because virtual demos are easier to attend for groups such as young people and new entrants.

** for example failing internet connections

Virtual demos as preferred demo setting

The above-mentioned opportunities bring us to the subsequent question: when can virtual demos be considered a ‘Plan A’ option? Of course the answer to this question relates to the opportunities mentioned before, but in interactive sessions with network leaders, some other suggestions were made as well.

If (one of) the goal(s) of the demo is to reach a diverse audience and to be inclusive mainly in terms of age and geographical location, virtual demos should be preferred over on-farm demos. Similarly, if the goal of a demo is to increase outreach and dissemination, virtual demos are a preferred option over on-farm demos since virtual demos attract larger audiences. Virtual demos are then a way to reach a heterogeneous audience (i.e. participants from different regions/countries, different types of farmers, advisors, policy makers, etc,) and a large audience. Related to this, virtual demos are also the preferred option when the goal is to include foreign expertise or knowledge, because it allows for simultaneous translation.

In some cases virtual demos may also be preferred to reduce costs if the budget is lacking. However, this will differ depending on the specific circumstances and demo topic. Virtual demos can also become expensive, for example, when equipment such as professional microphones are needed to record on a windy field or when videos have to be made beforehand. Virtual demos can reduce costs like travel costs, accommodation costs, etc.

Depending on the topic of the demo, meeting physically may be more important in some cases but less important in others. As mentioned before, virtual demos eliminate many senses such as touch. In cases where



senses are an important part of the demo experience, on-farm demos are preferred. However, when a demo event is centred around a topic such as management or economics, a virtual demo may be preferred because it does not rely on senses that require participants to be there in person. Moreover, it can be easier to demonstrate topics such as farm management tools in a setting where everyone can see a shared screen easily.

Further, within NEFERTITI, some hub coaches in the greenhouse horticulture sector switched to virtual demos (even before the COVID19 crisis) because of sanitary and hygiene rules which made it difficult to organise on-farm events. In cases like this, virtual demos become Plan A because on-farm events are too cumbersome or even impossible to organise.

Hybrid demo events

A last lesson learned about virtual demo events in NEFERTITI is that in many cases **hybrid demo events** are a good middle ground when on-farm demos are not possible, too expensive, etc. However, completely virtual demos are also not the best option. In such cases, a hybrid event where parts of the demo are live and other parts are virtual can be a solution. An example of such a hybrid demo is a set-up where a panel of experts or speakers is present in a studio or on a field, while participants join the demo via an online platform such as MS Teams where they can use the chat function or Q&A function to ask questions to the panel and discuss among themselves. In such a hybrid setting pre-recorded videos can also be incorporated or a live-connection to the field, although this last option requires more technical skills. Hybrid demo events can be considered a sustainable option for the future as it offers the best of both the virtual and ‘real-life’ world and hybrid demos are also useful for educational purposes. The virtual parts of hybrid demos are reusable and can be used in different contexts. These reusable components can also form part of a larger library where demo organisers can ‘shop’ for useful elements to add to their hybrid demo. Especially good quality videos can be an important part of such libraries. Within NEFERTITI we have not systematically set up such a library, but the [FarmDemo YouTube channel](#) offers interesting videos that might be incorporated in hybrid demos.

Table 3 provides an overview of preferred demo settings (on-farm, virtual or hybrid setting) for different goals and circumstances.

Table 3 Preferred demo setting for given circumstances

On-farm demo	Virtual demo	Hybrid demo
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sensory experiences are key for a successful outcome of the demo • The goal is to foster peer-to-peer exchanges and build on group dynamics • To foster networking is one of the main objectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The target group is big and diverse • The target group represents a wide geographical area • The target group are young farmers • Foreign speakers will be invited (speaking other languages) • Reduction travel and location costs • In case of sanitary restrictions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Similar as for virtual • In case an on-farm demo is not possible and you want to increase interaction compared to virtual demos and allow participants to have a hint of sensory experience

3.3 Collaboration in organising a demo

Organising a demo in the broad sense involves not only the logistic aspects of delivering the demo itself, but can also be extended to the whole preparation of making a programme, finding demonstrators and a location, promoting, recruiting participants, and the evaluation of the event.



Within NEFERTITI collaboration can be observed at different levels:

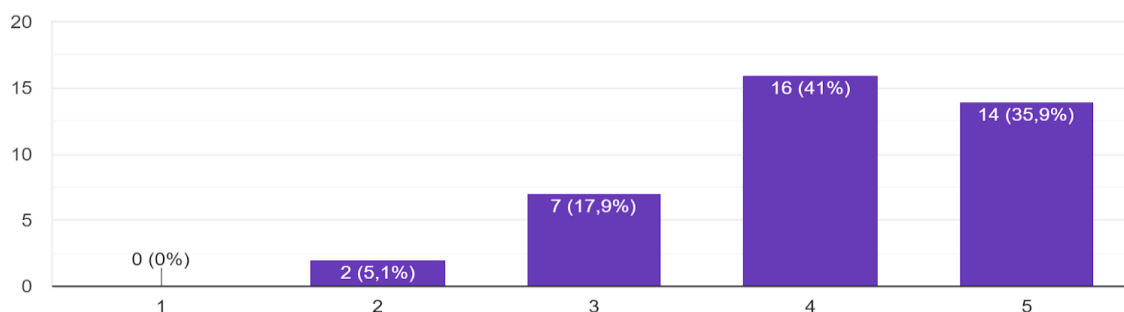
- hub level: the organisation of the demo events with other partners (source: hub journals) ;
- network level: the organisation of joint cross visits with two or three networks gathering to maximise their time, skills and interests (source: cross visits reports).

This section concentrates on the hub level. Few elements regarding collaboration at the network level are described in part 2.2.

The diagram below (hub coaches survey analysis) shows that among the 45 hub coaches interviewed, 39 have had resource to collaboration with advisory organisations, research institutes, policy officers, etc.) and mostly agreed that it improved the quality of their demos: 30 considered that it was very relevant or relevant, 7 were neutral and only 2 considered that cooperation with other organisations did not improve the quality of the demo event.

Cooperation with other organisations (e.g. advisory organisations, policy officers, etc.) improved the quality of my demo event (only fill in if applicable)

39 antwoorden



Hub journals reveal that one specific type of collaboration was specifically difficult to achieve: collaborations with policy makers and civil society. In some situations these kinds of partners were not invited at all, in others they did not join or very few only joined the demo event or cross visits. This phenomenon illustrates the gap that can exist between policy makers and farmers or between civil society and agriculture.

The hub journals and informal exchanges with hub coaches revealed the different reasons why cooperation can be beneficial:

- **The choice of the topic.** More partners involved means more ideas or inspiration to identify the relevant topic to better suit expectations. Embedding the topic within the local AKIS or the extended hub members of the thematic area enables the collective to identify relevant topics to be discussed within the territory. Indeed, farmers carry out their activities within a sector but they are often focused only on their own immediate needs. The role of the hub is to widen the perspective to find long term resilience for the target group.
- **The organisation and the facilitation of the demo.** Demo organisers can rely on the strength of the network to share responsibilities in the preparation process and on the D-day. On the one hand, the technical expertise can be shared between different organisations, which gives more credit to what is presented or discussed. Different stakeholders (with different backgrounds) can also be invited to share their perspective. On the other hand, the soft skills which are quite decisive in the success of a demo event (see part 3.1), can also be divided or attributed to the most experienced organisation (facilitating the exchanges, organisational skills etc.). Even if the facilitator is a dedicated person, it does not prevent other advisors from intervening during the demo. When the farmers are known by demo facilitators, they can be questioned during the demo and better involved in the discussion. In particular, if one participant is known to be a good storyteller, this can bring added value to the demo itself. Partnership is very valuable to be able to utilise a wide range of capacities and create synergies.



- **The communication and recruitment of participants.** There are many ways to promote a demo event: social media, newspapers, word of mouth between farmers or advisors, communication from farmer organisations or cooperatives etc. All these sources contribute to the promotion of the demo event. Having more organisations involved in the preparation of the demo also means that you can use their (virtual and physical) networks to spread the news among their diversified networks. That means a potential of more farmers attending the demo and in the end an increase of the number of participants. Especially in times of Covid when oral communication was limited, the dissemination of sector-specific farm news by the multiple participants' social media played a big role.
- **The monitoring.** In a collaboration the work for monitoring and evaluation can be divided amongst the collaborating organisations, which is often seen as a burdensome task. In NEFERTITI, insufficient importance was devoted to analysing whether the demo had an impact on the participants. Two main factors explain this phenomena: 1) organisers spend much time preparing the demo before and during the event, and once the demo is over they go back to what they have left behind during the preparation phase and do not give priority to the “after demo”; 2) measuring impact is difficult, and sometimes is considered impossible. Informal monitoring can be made through further conversations with advisors for instance. With more partners involved, there are more opportunities to gather feedback from different sources. To do so would require dedicating time to compiling information between the partners, which is not usually organised.
- **Keeping the NEFERTITI momentum after the project.** Inviting demo organisers or other partners (associations, agri coops etc.) who are not part of the NEFERTITI project to local demos or cross visits enriches the learning process. First of all it brings more experience to be shared and discussed about, secondly it may help organisers to better design their future demos based on the NEFERTITI guidelines and demo experience, and finally it may plant the seeds for future collaboration to build a wider practises exchange network and get involved in a new project. The participation of the global partnership ecosystem to NEFERTITI demo activities help to embed NEFERTITI and to contribute to its sustainability.

Some differences in view between partners can also bring disagreements or resistance to innovative proposals, but overall there were few instances of this found in the hub journals. One example was: *“We found some resistance from our co-organisers to move away from their standard webinar protocol. It was difficult to create opportunities for live interaction (other than via chat). We agreed to start in a conservative way and to slowly change the format if we gain more experience with webinars”.*



4

Conclusion



4 Conclusion

This deliverable outlines lessons learned and outcomes of the NEFERTITI project on two levels: on the level of collective learning and on the practical lessons as outcomes of these collective learning approaches. The results of the sources we consulted show that within NEFERTITI demo organisers (hub coaches) have made considerable improvements in demo organisation. This indicates that 'practice makes improvement' and merely organising demo events and evaluating the events afterwards is a first step in improving demo organisation and thereby ultimately contributing to accelerating sustainable innovation and making European agriculture more sustainable.

Based on the prior chapters, a number of recommendations can be offered both to demo organisers as well as to other future projects and initiatives wanting to use a collective learning approach to stimulate learning and peer-to-peer exchange in the context of sustainable European agriculture. **Recommendations** for such projects and initiatives are:

- On the hub level, where regional farmers are connected around demo activities, *peer-to-peer exchange*, facilitated by a demo organiser should be a central part of each farm demo activity;
- In order to successfully carry out this facilitation, demo organisers should be trained in both *technical and soft skills*. Most important soft skills that demo organisers should be trained in are facilitation, communication and general organisation skills. Having these skills greatly improves demos because demo organisers are then better able to facilitate and guide peer-to-peer exchange. Since demo organisers are usually experts on the thematic topic of a demo, training in soft skill needs more attention and be given the same priority;
- *Collaboration with other parties* such as input suppliers or advisors at the hub level and at the network level can be a useful way to embed focus on a topic within the wider AKIS context, ease organisation and facilitation of a demo, use networks of collaborators to reach the desired target group(s) and keep the momentum after the project or initiative ends by embedding the demo topic and/or network within existing and ongoing networks;
- When working in network settings, *building confidence and trust* is important to engage all network members and should therefore be given priority. Regular (e.g. monthly) meetings help to establish a sustainable and trusted network;
- In network settings, it is important to have a *network leader* who acts as a *facilitator* of peer-to-peer learning and exchange rather than a chief;
- Cross-visits or other types of *international exchange* are a beneficial way of connecting different countries who are dealing with similar thematic issues. When organising such exchanges, extra effort should be put into involving policy makers and public administration representatives since NEFERTITI experiences prove that these groups are often underrepresented, even though it is important to get their support for (organised) peer-to-peer exchange and the role policy can play in this regard;
- *Social and informal activities* should be considered an important part of any type of demo event, since many peer-to-peer exchanges take place during informal exchanges. An important side note: informal exchanges are hard to facilitate in virtual settings. Facilitation skills of the demo organiser are extra important in a virtual setting, while exchange can also be better prepared e.g. by using and arranging online tools;
- *Virtual demos* present both advantages (e.g. lower threshold to participate) and disadvantages (e.g. virtual setting hinders informal exchange). It is important to carefully consider which setting is most appropriate for each demo topic and demo objective.
- A demo consisting of both physical and virtual elements, a so-called *hybrid demo event* can offer the best of both worlds and may remain a sustainable option in the future, both for educational purposes as well as for increasing the reach and effectiveness of a demo event.

In this deliverable, three types of demo settings have been discussed: physical demo settings, virtual settings and hybrid demo settings. Each of these settings present both opportunities as well as bottlenecks. An overview of opportunities and bottlenecks is presented in Table 4 below:



Table 4 Bottlenecks and opportunities for physical, virtual and hybrid demo settings at different levels of peer-to-peer exchange

	Opportunities	Bottlenecks
Physical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Variety of opportunities for peer-to-peer exchange • Ideal setting for informal exchange • Ability to use sensory experiences • Ideal setting to foster networking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dependent on weather and seasonal conditions • Less inclusive in terms of remote and young populations
Virtual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reach a more inclusive target group (representation of remote and young populations) • Reduction of travel and location costs • Further reach via online platforms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited (informal) exchange • Limited peer-to-peer learning and co-learning • Technical difficulties • Limited use of senses
Hybrid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reach a more inclusive target group (representation of remote and young populations) • Reduction of travel and location costs • Further reach via online platforms • Hint of sensory experience • Sustainable option with reusable material for variety of purposes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited (informal) exchange • Limited peer-to-peer learning and co-learning • Technical difficulties • Limited use of senses

Within NEFERTITI, all three settings were tried and evaluated. Virtual and hybrid settings were applied initially out of necessity due to the COVID19-crisis. In situations where all three settings are a possibility, it is recommended to consult which of these settings should be the preferred choice given the specific circumstances and objective of the demo event. As indicated by the table above, one of the important lessons learned in NEFERTITI is that in certain circumstances, virtual or hybrid settings should be preferred over an on-farm demo event.



THIS PROJECT HAS RECEIVED FUNDING FROM THE EUROPEAN UNION'S HORIZON 2020 RESEARCH AND INNOVATION PROGRAMME UNDER GRANT AGREEMENT N. 772705

