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**Information systems facilitating national implementation of the
Common Agricultural Policy in collaboration with eFARMER project
under the eContent Programme**

CONFERENCE PAPER ABSTRACTS

Johannes KEIZER

Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)

Knowledge exchange infrastructure for Agricultural Research and Technology

AGRIS is the International Information System on Agricultural Sciences and Technology. Initially its primary purpose was to collect bibliographical references, from as many sources as possible, and make them available through a central database. The AGRIS database was subsequently supplemented by another database with information on research projects (CARIS). The AGROVOC Thesaurus was developed by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Commission of the European Communities in the early 1980s. Since then, it became an important tool which serves users, of both the aforementioned databases, by facilitating efficient information retrieval. AGRIS was from the beginning an undertaking to foster information and knowledge exchange in the international community of agricultural science and technology.

As in so many areas of our society, work in agricultural research and technology has become increasingly knowledge intensive. The exchange of knowledge be it horizontal flows between peers or vertical flows of knowledge to implementers and decision makers has become just as important as the quality of research produced in a single institution.

In the traditional systems peer to peer exchange was mainly organized through scholarly publishing, conference presentations and the occasional exchange of draft manuscripts. Knowledge transfer to implementers and decision makers was organized through experts' reports on one side and through extension services on the other side.

Today any discussion about knowledge management is clearly centred on the World Wide Web (WWW). In the first decade of the web, much of the work done was simply "digitizing" operations, procedures and material, that were previously executed in hardcopy. There is conceptually no big difference between a card catalogue and a digital one; both of which were searched by humans. Also Wordprocessors mere copied the known writing and editing operations into a digital environment. Individuals used the Web simply as a more efficient tool for publishing, storage and access. This resulted in millions of disparate information and knowledge stores, not sparing the domain Agriculture, which were oblivious to each other.

The specific strengths of a digital environment - usage of automatic agents and collaborative spaces without physical borders had yet to be exploited.

Some years ago, the inventor of the WWW, Sir Tim Berners-Lee, introduced the concept of the "Semantic Web" in which human operations could be substituted by machines. Since then, large amount of academic effort has been invested in this area resulting in the creation of knowledge formalization languages such as Resource Description Framework and the Ontology Web Language. However, no large-scale implementation examples have yet brought the idea to its full bloom.

More recently, a parallel development has resulted in what is popularly known as "Web 2.0". It is a movement that tries to overcome the isolation of knowledge repositories published on the web through human interaction and the creation of social networks. In applications, like flickr or de.licio.us, "collective intelligence" is harnessed to create connections between the personal spaces of information. For example, del.icio.us and Flickr

have opened up the concept of collaborative categorization (or tagging). The collaborative and free tagging (without the use of a standardized taxonomy) results in retrieval of information based on natural overlaps in knowledge spaces. Collaborative spam filtering products, like cloudmark, aggregate decisions of individual email users on what is a spam email and what is not and are outperforming systems that rely on automated analysis of the individual messages. Many of the Web 2.0 applications have become successful; however, scalability, interoperability and coherence remain important unanswered issues.

What are the implications of the new trends on Information and Knowledge Management in Agricultural Sciences and Technology?

AGRIS today is a loose network of Information and Knowledge Management Centres from all over the world, grouped around common standards and methodologies. The most important of these standards are the AGROVOC Thesaurus and the AGRIS Application Profile, a schema for bibliographical metadata exchange. The partners in the AGRIS network are now actively participating in a global agricultural Open Archive Initiative (OAI).

More recently, the AGROVOC Thesaurus has been used, in the form of domain and application ontologies, in several semantic web applications. It is also the building block of the Agricultural Ontology Service (AOS), a tool intended to deliver semantic standards to AGRIS partners and other stakeholders in the area of Agricultural Sciences and Technology. It is currently available via FAOs Agricultural Information Management Standards Website.

The AGRIS network is currently deliberating on a proposal for a semantically rich OpenArchives architecture in the area of Agricultural Sciences and Technology. The implementation of the new architecture would lead to a network of hundreds of open archives that are able to exchange information and create value-added services on top of it. This idea of an AGRIS OpenArchives Network would be a first step towards establishing a "Semantic Web" space for Agricultural Science and Technology – a research knowledge infrastructure for all research groups with the primary goal of combating hunger and poverty.

Tamás BORI

Policy Officer, European Commission, DG AGRI Unit 1- Direct support, e-mail:tamas.bori@ec.europa.eu
130 rue de la Loi, 10-03. 1049 Brussels, Belgium.

Background of SAPS and Top-Up rules, possible options of transition to the Single Payment Scheme

1. On 26 June 2003, the EU farm ministers adopted a fundamental reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Under the new CAP the vast majority of subsidies is paid independently from the volume of production to farmers, who have the freedom to produce what the market wants. To avoid abandonment of production, Member States may choose to maintain a limited link between subsidy and production under well defined conditions and within clear limits. These new "single farm payments" are linked to the respect of environmental, food safety and animal welfare standards (Cross-compliance). Member States were given the possibility for applying a transitional period for the introduction of the SPS until 2007 at the latest.

2. The direct payments in the new Member States are gradually introduced in the period 2004-2013 (2007-2016 in the case of BG and RO) through the mechanism of "phasing-in". New Member States have a derogation possibility to distribute the direct payments on a per hectare basis through a Single Area Payment Scheme (SAPS) until the end of 2010 (BG and RO 2011). Under this option the level of support is the same for all sectors. However, new Member States have the possibility, subject to authorisation by the Commission, to complement any direct payment with a complementary national direct payment (CNDPs or "top-ups"). The granting of CNDPs permit new Member States to raise the level of direct support received by their farmers in application of the "phasing-in" closer to the level of support applicable in the EU-15.

3. The “top-ups“ may be granted to direct payments which exist in the EU in a given year. In the "transitional period" (2004-2006) these payments could be distributed among farmers also in a fully coupled way. From 2007, when the SPS becomes obligatory in "non-SAPS" Member States, a number of direct payments have been fully included in the single payment scheme (i.e. fully decoupled) without any possibility to continue granting those aids coupled to the production. As a consequence, in the EU the legal possibility to grant coupled CNDP linked to the actual level of production such as on the basis of the actual number of hectares, animals or tonnes of milk quota or tonnes of leaf tobacco delivered will be reduced as a consequence of the progress in the implementation of the 2003 CAP reform. This will make it necessary in the SAPS Member States to some extent redesign their top-up system taking into account the new rules. The presentation will provide an explanation of some of these possible options.

Tibor CSEPREGI

Agricultural and Rural Development Agency(ARDA), Hungary, Budapest

ARDA Direct Payments Directorate in Hungary

The Directorate’s duties include the preparation and organization of the performance of the Agency’s tasks concerning support paid to applicants directly on the basis or in connection with the eligible farming area or animal stock, quota or quantity produced with financing from the EAGGF Guarantee Section and the national budget connectedly, as well as rural development measures financed from the Guarantee Section. Related to measures within its scope of duties, the Directorate performs the authorization of support applications based on community and national legislation and in compliance with implementation manuals, and manages registry systems related to authorization tasks.

The Directorate’s duties include the development of the internal procedures related to the performance of the tasks defined in section (1), the development of the manuals for related delegated and intermediate tasks, and the determination of a professional system of requirements for registry systems.

The Directorate comprises four units: the Crop Products Direct Payments Unit, the Animal Products Direct Payments Unit, the NRDP Restructuring Schemes Unit and the NRDP Land based Schemes Unit.

In 2006 the Directorate cooperated with eFarmer project in order to achieve eSAPS test phase. The presentation also mentions ARDA’s role in this successful collaboration.

Athéné NESZMÉLYI

European Commission, Directorate-General for Agriculture, Financial Management of EAGF
130 rue de la Loi, 10-03. 1049 Brussels, Belgium. e-mail: athene.neszmelyi@ec.europa.eu

Financial Management of the Common Agricultural Policy

The achievement of the objectives of the Common Agricultural Policy is supported by the financing of certain agricultural and rural development measures from the budgetary funds of the European Union. The financial management of these funds operates through the interactive communication of the European Commission and the Member States. Due to its significance for the Community and for the agricultural sector, the financial management of the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund benefiting agricultural expenditure is presented.

Adrian ZACH

Agency for Restructuring and Modernization of Agriculture - Polish Rural Payment Agency (ARiMR), Poland, Warsaw

SAPS claim submission service through an electronic platform - experiences from mutual pilotage of KRIR and a Polish Payment Agency

The presentation provides the description of experiences gathered during mutual pilotage program of KRIR (National Council of Agricultural Chambers) and ARMA (Agency for Restructuring and Modernization of Agriculture - Polish Rural Payment Agency) in 2006 SAPS claim submission through the Internet.

We would like to present how does the claim submission platform work and provide information about programme's goals, results and problems that have been identified, both from farmers and Agency side.

Finally, we would like to show the plans for the future due to the creation of fully functional „Internet Platform” for Agency clients based on our experiences.

Dana LINHARTOVÁ, Pavel MÁCHAL, and Alena KREJČÍ

Mendel university (MZLU), Czech Republik, Brno

Pedagogical and Psychological Aspects in eFarmer Education

Beside general principal educational activities, eFarmer advisors' education, both face to face and distance, must meet the certain specific necessary pedagogical and psychological parameters. The present paper highlights some of these major specific aspects and lessons learned in MZLU experience. Respecting them may help securing effective results in the eFarmer's practical assignments in field.

Rafał RZEPKOWSKI

Agricultural Advisory Centre (CDR), Poland, Brwinów

Using of eLearning in Polish Agricultural Advisory

Taking into consideration the need of introduction of educational activities and distance learning as modern and effective method of education in the structure of Polish state units of agricultural advisory, the Distance Advisory Study Network (DASN) was created in 2004. The project was initiated with resources co-financed by Phare Programme PL0104.02 the "National Agricultural Advisory System". Afterwards the 16 Distance Advisory Study Centers (DASC) were created. The System covers Advisory Units, including 16 voivodships. The National Contact Point (NCP) - on the national level was established in Brwinów.

The coordination of a Network was committed to Distance Learning Department in Brwinów. The main tasks are as follows:

- co-ordination of Distance Advisory Study Network in a scope of agriculture advisory services and development of rural areas.
- elaboration of educational materials (courses and modules of distance learning)
- co-operation with institutions and organizations on the national and international level.
- Elaboration of the training offer (payable and cost-free) directed to advisors, teachers, farmers and other inhabitants of rural areas
- co-ordination of programmes realized in co-operation with national institutions and organizations as well as partners from EU countries
- creation and management of the national system of advisory information (help desk).

Applied methods possess following essential advantages :

- possibility of providing education on distance;
- communicating between trainee and a teacher by using computer technology
- provide the possibility of open education
- facilitates of accessibility to education for specific professionals and social groups
- assures the equal quality of education for all participants
- reduces costs of education in relation to traditional methods.

In last two years there were over 1500 agricultural advisers trained. In coming time it's intended to implement next 7 courses.

At present the system of education proposed by AAC is aimed only for agricultural advisors. Our intention is to develop this form of education for farmers and the rural inhabitants.

Endre SZÉLL^a, Katalin TAKÁCSNÉ GYÖRGY^b, Péter REISINGER^c, Levente BARKASZI^b, and István FÖLDI^d

^aSzegedi Gabonatermesztési Kutató Kht., Hungary, Szeged

^bSzent István Egyetem, Gazdaság-és Társadalomtudományi Kar, Vállalatgazdaságtani- és Szervezési Intézet, Hungary, Gödöllő

^cNyugat-Magyarországi Egyetem, Mezőgazdasági- és Élelmiszertudományi Kar, Hungary

^dAgroplanta Kft, Hungary

Internet based weed management advisory system for corn production

The result of corn production is decisively influenced by the success or failure of weed management. The fact holds true even for corn production that well-grounded decisions may be made only with adequate professional knowledge that not all producers possess nowadays, unfortunately. Well-prepared professionals are able to manage weed problems cost-efficiently assuring profitable and at the same time environmentally sound, sustainable production.

Keeping an eye on this goal our 4 member consortium has been formed that won a tender to build a weed management advisory system based on internet and GIS. Our visualised system is aimed at solving the problem presented beforehand. The main logic of the system is that farmers may log onto the main server through the internet where the decision support module is running and upload their basic data related to farming. On the basis of the input data and the built in databases the program generates several weed management alternatives for the given weed problem. According to the different level of preparedness of farmers the system will be able to handle the weed problems on four different levels. On the highest level precision weed management will be possible. In addition the program will be able to provide the necessary documents for the farmers taking part in the agro-environmental programs.

At the present state of the development the program manages the first and the second level utilising interactive and excel based inputs. We intend to present our results that we have reached so far.

Tibor SUTÓRIS

Novitech Plc., Slovakia 040 01 Košice Moyzesova 58

eFarmer project – behind the project

Lack of up-to-date information and knowledge on CAP (Common Agriculture Policy) within the farmer communities mainly in the less favoured areas of the new Member States may critically affect the adaptation and approximation process in agriculture across the European Union.

The eFarmer project contributes to social inclusion process of the newly acceded Member States, to the IT awareness in rural areas, and to the accomplishment of goals in the territory of the V-4 countries (CZ, HU, PL, SK) with special aspect of cross-border cooperation.

The strategic objective of the project is to improve and enhance the flow of information within CAP relating to various aid options offered by the state administration to farmers of the V-4 countries. It is to provide instruction for use of web based services for farmers and entrusted agents (advisors, banks, farmers' associations, etc.) to prepare, complete, and submit claims to national Rural Payment Agencies via Internet.

The technical objectives include CAP content transformation in structured knowledge database accessible for farmer community containing relevant country specific information necessary for preparation and submission of claims (regulations, claim templates, cadastre maps, etc.).

Introduction of web services to assist farmers, electronic claim submission using eFarmer content (rules, manuals, form templates, etc.) as input source, establishment of pilot groups of eFarmer user network for farmer community are other project objectives.

The project is before completion. Project end is scheduled for end of February 2007. The project actual accomplishment includes the Claim submission system, CAP knowledge base, and eLearning system for farmers. Reflecting the conditions in the V-4 countries Customization of the concerned project parts are still in progress.

Dr. László Gábor PAPÓCSI

St Stephen University, Hungary 2100 Gödöllő Pater Karoly u 1, szie@efarmer.net

Practical results and perspectives for electronic claim submission and related online advisory services in Hungary

The St Stephen University in collaboration with the Agricultural and Rural Development Agency (ARDA/MVH: the Hungarian Rural Paying Agency) has achieved a successful pilot operation of electronic claim filling-in service in 2006, in the course of implementation of eFarmer project. The value of this experience is enhanced by the fact that only Hungarian project partner SzIE was „lucky enough” to realize main fundamental project objective of so called Level 2 operation, while other partners from rest of the V4 countries could reach a lower level of cooperation, with their respective paying agencies.

In the Hungarian pilot operation nearly 2% of total eligible SAPS area was claimed through the IT system developed with eFarmer project background, accounting to nearly 10 million euros of subsidy request. The evaluation of the pilot's results gave useful information for improving web portal content services and claim software functionalities for 2007.

Because of a significant increase in electronic claim workflow services expected to be introduced by ARDA from 2007 in Hungary offered for access by larger farms and their state advisors, there is time now for serious consideration in eFarmer project to define new strategic directions, possible ways of interactions between eGovernment systems and eFarmer service modules. One currently emerging option is accessing public web services, while another promising opportunity is an XML based claim form pre-validation and filling-in service.

Imre WAYDA

Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, 1054 Budapest, Kossuth ter 11. Hungary, imre.wayda@fvm.hu

The role of the advisory system in the implementation of CAP reform

The Hungarian agricultural advisory system has been changed in the past year. The former system based on the 95/1999. (XI. 5.) ministerial regulation on the Registry of Agricultural Advisors, which was published in 1999. It lays down the requirements (professional, ethical etc.) related to agricultural advisors whose services can be subsidized by the state.

New legislation is being prepared for governing the structure and operation of the agricultural advisory system in accordance with the relevant EU regulations (1782/2003/EK, and 1698/2005/EK). The main characteristics of the new system are:

- advisory service for the farmers and forest holders is provided by the Territorial Advisory Centres (TAC-s);
- TAC-s are selected in open tender invited by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD);
- TAC-s have to be able to provide complex advice at least on all the Statutory Management Rules (SMR-s) and the Good Agricultural and Ecological Conditions (GAEC) stated in 1782/2003/EK, and also on work safety;
- farmers and forest holders that use the advisory services provided by a TAC may receive partial reimbursement of the advisory fee under the New Hungary Rural Development Program;
- tasks attached to running the advisory system (registration of the advisors and TAC-s, monitoring and control, further training of the advisors, providing professional data and information for TAC-s and advisors, etc.) are completed by the National Advisory Centre and the Regional Advisory Centres and the Professional Centres, while MARD has the ultimate responsibility for the operation of the system;

Some of the planned advisory tools:

Desktop programs

- o Farm log program
- o Expert programs (electronic pesticide list, business-plan making program, fertilization plan,)

Internet-based advisory services

- o E-farmer project
- o Phytosanitary forecast
- o Information and databases on web-sites

Checklist (for CC requirements)

Farm visits by advisors

„Demonstration farm” visits for farmers.

doc. Ing. Jaroslav JÁNSKÝ, CSc., Ing. Radka REDLICOVÁ, and dr. Ing. Zdeněk HAVLÍČEK

MZLU v Brně, Zemědělská 1, 613 00 Brno, Czech Republic

The direct payments system in the Czech republic in the framework of projects eFarmer

The accession of the Czech Republic to the EU is linked with conditions of Common Agriculture Policy and with the system of direct payments SAPS and Top-Up. The goal of direct payments is to accept suitable environmental measures related to agricultural land area and agricultural production, to stabilize employment in agrarian sector, to sustain reasonable living standards of rural population, and contribute to overall economic welfare.

Progressive form of direct payments has been set for new member states for time period 2004 – 2007. These direct payments are as high as 25-30-35-40 % of the amount of direct payments in EU15 and afterwards 10 % annual rise with the possibility to increase the payments by additional 30 % from the national budgets in every year, however maximally up to 100 % of the rates in EU15.

Impacts of direct payments for economics of agrarian enterprises are given by the size of direct payment per hectare of arable land, possibly per livestock unit, or as the case might be according to the number of beef cows, sheep or goats.

According to the SAPS is possible to ask for the payments for the following crops (according to the section 3i of the Agriculture Code) whereas the crops type does not influence the payment size: arable land, herbage – permanent pasture, herbage – other, vineyard, hop garden, orchard, other crop.

The additional payment (Top-Up) is the payment provided as addition to the Single Area Payment Scheme (SAPS) and is administered by the Government Regulation that settles some details and closer conditions for the administrations of the national additional payments in addition to the direct payments by the State Agricultural Intervention Fund. This payment is provided in a form of subsidy. Top-Up will be provided for following areas:

- flax for fibre growing on the agricultural land that is stated in the Evidence of the land-use according to the owners states as agricultural cultivations arable land,
- hops growing on the agricultural land that is stated in the Evidence of the land-use as a agriculture cultivation hop garden,
- cattle, ovine and goat breeding (in the following “the ruminant breeding”) on the farms registered in the Central evidence
- growing of the crops eligible for the payments on the arable land

The aim of the paper is the analysis of the used system of direct payments in the framework of eFarmer project in the conditions of Czech Republic and the draft of its future development.

Szilárd KESZTHELYI PhD, Árpád TÖRZSÖK, and András KISS

Agricultural Economics Research Institute, Hungary, Budapest

The farmer's interest -- Delivering custom information for agricultural enterprises using the Hungarian FADN

In an ongoing project our team is trying to provide an easy on-line access to information that has been collected and published for several years, but has so far only been used by government and research purposes. The source of the data is the Farm Accountancy Data Network, a data collection framework proposed, and established by the European Commission in 1965. Since then it has grown to be a major resource for the analysis of the incomes and economic activities of farms and thus for the support of the Common Agricultural Policy.

Supplying data to this information system is an obligation of the member states towards the Commission. The Hungarian system of FADN was initiated in order to meet the requirements of the European FADN, and to fill national information needs at the same time. Data from the Hungarian FADN is used widespread for planning and realization of measures of agricultural policy, and also serves as a major resource for agricultural economics research. Using the database in farm consultancy has so far been limited.

The goal of the project is to make information from FADN available to farmers through an internet front-end. Instead of mere averages that are often irrelevant to farmers, this system will be able to provide them with information specific to their size and type of farming. These data can serve as a benchmark for agricultural entrepreneurs to assess the results, efficiency and productivity of their farming to similar enterprises. Furthermore, using a business simulation forecast model (MICROSIM) developed in our institute we can also provide them with the expected future income situation of farms of similar size and type.

M. MIŠOVIČ, and J. ANDRÝSKOVÁ

Mendel university (MZLU), Czech Republik, Brno

An assessment of advisory activity

Advisory activities are boom of the present time. These activities are the main goal of special advisory firms providing professional counseling to certain interesting area (agriculture, health, rights, ...). These firms have researched methods how to evaluate Advisory Service results and as a result of it to rebuild partial advisory processes (reengineering).

This contribution shows an existence of a very efficient method for evaluation of advisory activities. The introduction of such new conceptions as Standard Activity Cases (SAC) and Real Advisory Cases (RAC) is a core of this method. Each of SAC type depicts a certain string of advisory processes with determined a final expense and an expense inside each of advisory case. Unlike of the SAC its each RAC can be completed by an auxiliary process, as for example: introducing, cancelling, resuming and ending process. This reflects a real progress of each real advisory case.

We generally expect the advisory management needs get to know the state of all closed and not closed real advisory cases. To achieve this goal there is necessary:

1. to force the advisory firm IS to archive a metadata of all SAC types
2. to produce a metadata about all just continuing (not closed) real advisory cases
3. to find a method for evaluating relation between metadata of a selected SAC and metadata all with it associated real advisory cases.

An application that should be constructed according to point 3 probably could be very useful for the eFarmer project portal.

J. V. KROUZEK

Czech Republik

Proposal for international outreach of the eFarmer project towards know how transfer to other countries.

In the paper several options of the transfer of know-how from the eFarmer project to other countries in Central and Eastern European region will be discussed, in particular the development/design of follow-up projects, oriented towards establishment and/or strengthening of existing advisory and consulting services in agricultural and SME sectors, development and implementation of internet based portals and networks, using the available eFarmer project and FAO know-how, integrating the global, national, regional and individual farmer aspects. Concrete examples of such projects to be used by interested parties will be proposed with the possibility of utilizing EU financing. Such projects will be also based on lessons learned and the recent experience with eFarmer project development and implementation and EU development co-operation interventions.

Milan VARGA

Novitech Plc., Slovakia 040 01 Košice Moyzesova 58, Phone: +421 55 2374 415, Fax: +421 55 6221043, E-mail: varga_milan@novitech.sk

Implementation of eFarmer System eFARMER 2007 Central European Conference

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has evolved to meet society's changing needs, so that food safety, preservation of the environment, has acquired steadily growing importance. The expansion of the EU in 2004 increased the number of farmers from 7 to 11 million, increased the agricultural land area by 30% and crop production by 10-20%. However direct payments will be phased in over 10 years (2004–2013), starting at 25% of the rate paid to existing countries in 2004, and 30% for 2005. Such complex environment required up-to-date information and knowledge of the farmer communities on CAP, mainly in the less favored regions of the new Member States. eFarmer project has focused on this problem and as result of development is a basic set of on-line Farmer Communication Services (FCS) which are reducing this critical information and knowledge gaps. This paper covers following topics: Farmer Communication Services, Requirements for CMS in the eFarmer project, Object-oriented content model, eFarmer system architecture and eFarmer eLearning.

Beata PAUL

National Council of Agricultural Chambers (KRIR), Poland

Building Network of Polish eFarmers through eFarmer Project

One of the Workpackages to be performed within the eFarmer Project was WP4: Verification by pilot eFarmer group. This assignment definitely contributed to the development of Polish network of agricultural specialists. The tasks to be executed within WP4 consisted in recruitment and selection of eFarmers, organizing training for them and performing customization and demonstration of the portal www.efarmer.pl through them. The National Council of Agricultural Chamber was supported by almost Polish regional chambers in performing these tasks. The presentation shows the engagement of regional chambers in the co-operation within this Workpackage. The mutual work was a good occasion for meeting lots of people involved in giving support and advisory for Polish farmers. Not only meetings of specialists were organized. The Boards, directors and accountants of regional

agricultural chambers had also possibility to discuss on better engagement of local advisors in order to ensure the aid to farmers more effectively.

One of the significant result of this cooperation was informing approx. 10.000 farmers and persons associated with rural areas in total about the project and its goals. Finally, 175 persons were selected for the position of key pilot eFarmer in the first round and 105 in the second round. All of them were trained how to operate the portal and use its functionality in order to effectively help farmers in getting financial support from EU. Most of them are farmers, agricultural advisors or employees of the regional agricultural chambers. The other essential result of the eFarmer Project is raising the awareness of members of regional agricultural chambers if to achieve the success the strengths must be linked.

J. ZÁHORKA and J. NEKVASILOVÁ

Chamber of Agriculture (AKCR), Czech Republic, Prague

Experience with the implementation of regional info days and workshops promoting eFarmer project in the Czech Republic

In the paper the experience with the preparation, implementation and evaluation of 9 information days and 2 workshops to promote the eFarmer project in the Czech Republic will be presented.

The 9 regional information days were attended by the total of 855 participants, these being farmers and managers of larger agricultural firms/companies, i.e. end user target group of the eFarmer project. The information days provided demonstration of the eFarmer portal, communication services for farmers and practical tests of SAPS application submission. The majority of responses were positive and showed considerable interest for the eFarmer project.

The two regional workshops were focused on work with practical candidates for the eFarmer advisory positions - managers of regional agricultural centres who are very well familiar with the SAPS and CAP problems. In total 71 participants attended the workshop and expressed support for the eFarmer advisory and communication services and interest in the partner programme.

In the conclusion of the paper ideas for the eFarmer project follow-up based on the above experience with the implementation of the Info Days and workshops will be given.