

## Thematic Workshop 1:

# Better together! Study groups as an efficient method for professional training

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Language of workshop: English / Slovene

The study group is an effective agricultural extension method that works along the principle of problem solving through group dynamics with the help of a moderator, which ensures that all members are actively involved. In such a group there is an exchange of views and experiences between the stakeholders themselves.

For a successful operation of a study group, it is necessary to involve motivated participants that share similar problems and interests and pursue similar goals related to their agricultural practice. Prerequisites for a successful operation of study groups such groups are (i) trust (information is not spread outside the group), (ii) respect for the ideas of all participants, (iii) open exchange of ideas and experiences between the study group participants and (iv) a certain level of responsibility of the study group members (ie. regular and active participation). The moderator has a pivotal role in the operation of the study group. This role is usually attributed to agricultural extension officers; apart from moderating the study group, they usually perform also the expert role, preparing the quantitative basis for the exchange of views and experiences between the study group members. Depending on the topic, other extension specialists may also take part in the meetings.

Successful study groups are characterised by a mutual flow of knowledge and experience among farmers themselves, the moderators, and other specialists that may take part in the knowledge exchange.

This workshop will present and compare the practical experience, and knowledge gained throughout the implementation of agricultural study groups in Austria and Slovenia. In order to provide comparable grounds for the workshop, the practical experience will be shared on the operation of the study groups with dairy farmers. In both countries, dairy sector brings major contribution to the overall agricultural output. The choice of the dairy sector also draws from the fact that organisation of dairy production is particularly complex, which in turn requires a complex and versatile approach towards study group moderation. In this sense, study groups in dairy production could

serve as raw models for organisation of study groups of any other sector.

Exchange of experience on study groups between Austria and Slovenia will be particularly interesting, as study groups in Slovenia were largely building on Austrian expertise and experience. Over the years though, they have modified the approach in order to adapt to the context. It will be useful and instructive to see how the approaches differ nowadays.

The workshop will be an excellent opportunity for the agricultural extension communities to exchange and evaluate their practice with their neighbouring counterparts. It is also an excellent opportunity to deepen and extend cooperation between the farm extension specialists from Austria and Slovenia.

The structure of the workshop will be as follows:

1. Introductory presentation of the theory of study groups in agriculture and an overview of their operation in Slovenia and Austria (15'); dr. Marco Horn and mag. Martin Nose\*
2. Presentation of experiences with the operation of study groups among dairy farmers in Austria (20'); Peter Kristof and dr. Marco Horn
3. Presentation of experiences with the operation of study groups among dairy farmers in Slovenia (20'); Damjan Jerič \*
4. Moderated group discussion (25'); moderator mag. Martin Nose
5. Conclusions and take-away messages (5'); dr. Marco Horn

\* slides in English, presentation in Slovene

We encourage extension officers and farm management specialists to actively contribute with applied knowledge and experiences in the discussion part of the workshop. The outcomes of the discussion may well go beyond the initial focus of the workshop, which is the dairy sector.