

Agroforestry Innovations Networks in Europe

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Abstract

Agroforestry (AF) is a climate-smart agriculture (CSA) practice of deliberately integrating woody vegetation (trees or shrubs) with crop and/or animal systems to benefit from the resulting ecological and economic interactions. It is recognized as a proactive “negative emissions technologies” ([Intergovernmental Panel on Climate change \(IPCC\) 1.5SR](#)) that can foster sustainability in the current changing climate conditions. However, there are knowledge gaps to be filled regarding agroforestry, as well as bottlenecks and challenges. These could be solved by providing greater access to research findings (either published or unpublished) and identifying and extending good practices that farmers are already implementing.

Keywords: AFINET, RAIN, Stakeholders, Thematic

1. Introduction

Agroforestry (AF) is a climate-smart agriculture (CSA) practice of deliberately integrating woody vegetation (trees or shrubs) with crop and/or animal systems to benefit from the resulting ecological and economic interactions (Mosquera-Losada et al., 2018). It is recognized as a proactive “negative emissions technologies” ([Intergovernmental Panel on Climate change \(IPCC\) 1.5SR](#)) that can foster sustainability in the current changing climate conditions. However, there are knowledge gaps to be filled regarding agroforestry, as well as bottlenecks and challenges. These could be solved by providing greater access to research findings (either published or unpublished) and identifying and extending good practices that farmers are already implementing.

2. The Network

A consortium of 13 partners from 9 European countries, launch AFINET (AgroForestry Innovation NETworks) (AFINET, 2019), a thematic network aiming to foster the exchange and the knowledge transfer of agroforestry among scientists and practitioners in Europe. Two main aspects were delivered by AFINET: (i) The creation of a European Interregional network, composed of ‘Regional Agroforestry Innovation Networks (RAINs)’, working groups created in 9 strategic regions of Europe (Spain, UK, Belgium, Portugal, Italy, Hungary, Poland, France, and Finland); (ii) The creation of a European Innovation Knowledge Reservoir of scientific and practical

knowledge of agroforestry with user-friendly access (the ‘[Knowledge Cloud](#)’). This Innovation Knowledge Reservoir is created and have hundreds of documents already uploaded.

3. Activities Of The Network

Regional Agroforestry Innovation Networks have been meeting every six months to focus on different aspects of the project in each AFINET region. Until now, RAINs have already met four times in each region. The average number of participants in each of the nine RAIN was 30 people that represented over 500 actors talking and discussing about agroforestry. The meetings had similar aims in all EU regions to include a set of presentations by agroforestry experts (researchers and practitioners), discussion sessions, and farm visits where agroforestry practices are implemented.

4. Results

Throughout these events networking among participants was encouraged. First two meetings aimed at discussing agroforestry challenges and bottlenecks and providing possible solutions or ideas to tackle them. Main results of the challenges and bottlenecks to uptake agroforestry by practitioners in Europe where: technical, economical, education and communication and policy. AFINET’s methodology has proven to be effective in gathering existing knowledge that had not been available before. During the RAIN meeting sessions, people from a variety of backgrounds have worked hand in hand with a common goal: to promote and enhance the implementation of agroforestry. Members confront despair bottlenecks, such as economic, technical or policy-related, however they have leveraged each other’s strengths to work together for solutions.

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