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Nextfood - Educating the next generation of professionals in the agrifood system

Practice Abstract #21: Involving local actors in action research

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Engagement of local actors and creation of linkages with local agri-food systems is a successful element in the action research approach developed in the MSc course in Organic Agriculture (MOA) by the CIHEAM team. Learners are confronted with sustainability issues affecting decisions of local actors and are involved in working out concrete solutions together with them. This ensures an active role of local actors that become key informants and participants in the problem-solving and learning process. CIHEAM engaged the LAG (Local Action Group) as key stakeholders in the Alto Salento region. Together with local actors, MOA students were mobilised by the LAG, focusing on initiatives to promote typical products of the region. At the end of the process, learners and local actors delivered workable proposals to have access to LAG funding, thereby achieving a shared vision for medium-term attainable results.

Involve a local authority like LAG that has ties with the region and can mobilise a range of local actors; local actors should represent different perspectives (environmental, social, economic, cultural, etc.) and reflect different interests in the agri-food system; learners should be engaged in activities supporting concrete processes and initiatives aimed at local sustainable development (action plans, funding applications, etc.); participation and dialogue should receive due space to build networks and linkages with local actors, therefore visits and meetings (also remotely) have to be planned in accordance with the class activities; the local authority should feel involved in the process as an active part of it and motivation should be based on common interests achievement but also on financial reward for the time and effort devoted.