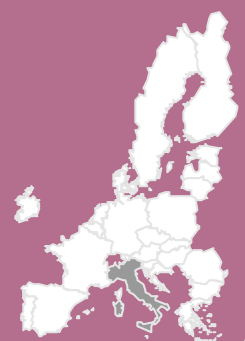




Support to
generational
renewal

AKIS-in-practice! 9.2

Inspiring the Next Generation: Engaging Youth through the Rural4Learning Project



Keywords/Tags



Secondary school
integration



Peer-to-peer learning



Study visits



Potential users



Managing Authorities



AKIS Coordination Bodies



Advisory services providers



ISS



Farmers



CAP Network



RATIONALE



Knowledge transfer and innovation are essential for the sustainability of the agricultural, agrifood, and forestry sectors, and remain a priority for the growth of rural areas in a rapidly change. With agriculture facing challenges such as climate change, resource scarcity, and technological advancements, equipping the next generation with relevant training ensures they can adopt innovative and sustainable practices. This education not only prepares young people to become skilled farmers/advisors but also instills a sense of responsibility for environmental stewardship and food security. By empowering youth with agricultural knowledge, we also encourage entrepreneurship, driving economic growth and revitalizing rural communities. Thus, it is essential to bridge the knowledge divide between different geographic areas and strengthen networks that act as cognitive multipliers. These networks can ensure equitable and collective learning, facilitate the exchange of knowledge and expertise, and support both formal and informal methods of knowledge transmission. In this sense, agricultural institutions and universities can play a crucial role in providing such competences and knowledge.



As part of the National Rural Network, the Italian Ministry of Agriculture, Food Sovereignty and Forestry promoted the project “Rural4Learning. Cultivate your passion for the land”. The aim was to educate the students of Italian agricultural institutes and universities on experiences, knowledge and good practices of rural development. At the same time, the project offers to Italian Regional Managing Authorities a replicable model, through the intervention dedicated to the Communication of the CAP Strategic Plan, to transform rural development good practices into a tool for sustainable growth. The collaborative project model uses a format that combines e-learning lessons with researchers, sector experts and university lecturers with a week-long field experience that stimulates networking between public administrations, the education system and farms. Rural4Learning also fosters peer-to-peer exchange, allowing participants to learn from one another’s experiences in different rural settings. The involvement of successful local farmers and entrepreneurs provides inspiration and mentorship, while practical placements in rural enterprises offer real-world experience. The program concludes with a project competition, encouraging participants to present business ideas or projects that could contribute to the rural economy.

The Rural4Learning project comprises two tracks: 4University and 4School.

- **Rural4University** targets university students in their third year of a Bachelor's degree and first year of a Master's degree, with the primary goal of providing in-depth training and information on sustainability and innovation. The program aims to raise awareness of best business practices and successful experiences supported by the CAP Strategic Plan, offering students practical insights and knowledge tailored to these critical areas.
- **Rural4School** provides a training and communication pathway on rural development policy, designed for teachers and students of Agricultural Technical Institutes, and recognized as part of the **Alternanza Scuola Lavoro** (school-work alternation program). The initiative aims to strengthen the connection between Agricultural Institutes, local territories, and farms, while also guiding students toward university education and future employment opportunities.

In 2023, the initiative evolved into **"Open Farms: Rural Connections"**, which aims to engage new generations not only at the individual level but also as integral parts of a broader ecosystem that connects businesses, rural areas, and territories. Specifically, it offers students at Agricultural Institutes a ‘mini-learning’ course designed to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and experiences across generations. This approach fosters collaboration and strengthens the ties between education and agricultural practices.

During the programming period 2014-2022, Rural4Learning initiatives played a crucial role in promoting discussions about rural development among diverse stakeholders and systems. Specifically, Rural4Agrari (2014-2016) involved 33 agricultural institutes and 1,600 students; Rural4Università (2017-2018) engaged 17 universities across Italy with 1,500 students and was replicated by various regions in 2019-2020. Rural4University in 2021 and Rural Worlds in 2022 included 24 universities, 800 students, and over 50 sustainable and innovative farms (source: Lattanzio, 2023). This initiative also promoted dialogue on rural development among diverse stakeholders, supported peer-to-peer knowledge transfer, and actively contributed to selecting, analyzing, and compiling best practices for the new CAP. This engagement facilitated a focus on the Strategic Plan for the CAP 2023-2027, emphasizing the ecological and digital transitions while enhancing all links in the agri-food supply chain by nurturing innovative ideas, proposals, and solutions from the teams involved.

Box 1 : Alternanza scuola-lavoro program (school-work alternation program)

Alternanza Scuola-Lavoro (now known as PCTO - Pathways for Transversal Skills and Orientation) is a mandatory part of the educational curriculum for high school students in Italy.

Specifically, it requires:

- 210 hours for students in vocational schools.
- 150 hours for technical institute students.
- 90 hours for students in high schools (licei).

The PCTO aims to provide practical work experience, and it is part of the students' final assessment. It involves collaboration between schools and external organizations, including companies and non-profits, and plays a key role in preparing students for the workforce by fostering soft skills, critical thinking, and hands-on experience.

IN PRACTICE



Open Farms 2023 - Rural Connections is a project promoted by the Italian National Rural Network, with the collaboration of CREA, financed with funds from the Technical Assistance measure of 2014-2022 RDP and joined by several Italian regions and universities.

The activities of the 2023 Open Farms – Rural Connections initiative are divided into the following phases:

I. Online training, dissemination and research (48h)**Training**

Context and topics: Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) for the period 2023-2027. CAP National Strategic Plan (NSP). Ecological regime, Common organisation of agricultural markets (CMO), agro-climatic-environmental measures.

Outputs: 1 training course structured in 3 teaching modules, 1 final test to check learning.

Target audience: university students (bachelor, master, doctorate or master) from the project partner universities.

Dissemination

Context and topics: CAP Strategic Plan: Sustainability, quality, innovation, cooperation.

Outputs: Part 1: 1 workshop aimed at university students, preparatory to the construction of the dissemination event (virtual classroom, 60'). Mini-learning for knowledge transfer to secondary school students (university or virtual classroom, 120').

Part 2: 1 teaching workshop also aimed at preparing slides, video-interviews and a dissemination kit, 1 science dissemination event aimed at professionals and the public.

Target audience: students and project partners.

Research

Context and topics: CAP, PSP. Sustainability, quality, innovation, cooperation

Themes: sustainability, quality, innovation, policies

Outputs: 1 public call addressed to farms, 1 training workshop, 2 thematic cafés with farms, with hearings, focus groups and group work, aimed at listening, analysing and evaluating farm cases.

Beneficiaries: 100 participants selected from the participants in phase 1.

It was also possible to join individual training units (e.g. online training).

II. Field Action namely Hackathon Camp (48h)

Context and topics: CAP SP: Sustainability, quality, innovation, cooperation.

Output: a field course, structured in 3 study visits (specialised farms - plant and animal production, mixed), study and analysis of practical cases, team research of ideas and solutions and development of project proposals.

Target group: 48 motivated students, selected from those who took part in the first two phases, 3 stakeholders and 3 farms (case studies) selected in phase 2.

Program of the final phase of the Hackathon Camp 2024

DAY 1 - AGRICULTURE OF SHARING

h 12.00| Participants' registration and welcome

h 13.30 | Networking lunch

h 14.30 | INAUGURAL CEREMONY - Introduction to the Camp

h 17.30 | Study tour

h 18.30| DYNAMICS OF INTERACTION WITH FARMERS: CONTADINNERS - Sharing of products and experiences

h 21. 00| Dinner

DAY 2 - HACKATHON LAUNCH AND STUDY VISIT

HACKATHON LAUNCH - Working group formation and team building

h 10. 00 | STUDY VISIT on farm 1

h 13.00 | Tasting of the farms' products

h 14.30 | STUDY VISIT on farm 2

h 18.00 | Return to the hotel

h 20.00 | Dinner at the hotel 3 - GROUP WORKSHOPS AND IDEAS WORKSHOP

DAY 3

H 09. 00| METHODOLOGICAL TOOLS - Tutors' Pitch

h 10.00 | Team work and brainstorming - Study and analysis of company cases

h 13.00 | Lunch

h 14.00 | WORKSHOP OF IDEAS - Technical-scientific and creative workshops - Innovation and support tools for farm problem solving - Start-up and design thinking

h 16.00 | Production of papers

h 18.00 | Guided tour of the city hosting the location

h 20. 00 | Dinner

h 21.30 | Focus group with the participants - CULTURAL FOOD AND DISSEMINATION IN THE FIELD

DAY 4

h 09.00| CULTURAL FOOD - Co-design to generate opportunities for companies

h 10.00 | DISSEMINATION IN THE FIELD - Exchange of ideas and sharing of results with farms

h 13.00 | Lunch

h 14.00 | Closing of the workshop

Box 2 : Contadinner

Contadinner is an innovative initiative developed by Vazapp aimed at revitalizing the agricultural landscape in Apulia Region, Italy, but then it has been exporting outside the country. The project organizes a series of dinners in rural settings, where young farmers gather to discuss their challenges and share experiences in a collaborative environment. The name "Contadinner" combines "contadino" (farmer) and "dinner," highlighting its focus on engaging farmers in meaningful conversations about their work and community.

It became a format of interaction used during the camp of Rural4Learning.

Originally, it took place in the home of a farmer, who was asked to invite their neighbors. This setting creates an informal atmosphere that immediately fosters trust. The meetings are conducted in a circle; there is no one assigned to teach or give orders. The gathering begins with participants introducing themselves in pairs to alleviate any discomfort about speaking in front of the group, allowing them instead to make eye contact. Each person then presents their partner to the entire group.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR REPLICABILITY



To ensure the replicability of the Open Farms initiative, several key elements must be considered:

- **Formalized agreements:** Establishing formal agreements between CAP Network, regional Managing Authorities and Universities is essential for standardizing the collaboration across different regions. This creates a consistent framework, ensuring both educational institutions and local authorities are aligned in their goals and commitments, facilitating long-term cooperation and cross-regional fertilization of student's skills.
- **Budget allocation:** A dedicated budget from CAP SP Technical Assistance interventions (or other national/regional funds) is necessary for both the training and fieldwork phases.
- **Scalable training model:** The program's e-learning modules, which combine theoretical lessons, practical case studies, and testing, can easily be adapted for different regions/Member States or educational institutions. This model can be adjusted to reflect local agricultural practices and challenges, making it applicable in various contexts.



BENEFITS



- Youth engagement by providing educational opportunities and practical experience.
- Skill development tailored to the needs of the agricultural and rural sectors.
- Promotion of sustainable agricultural practices, encouraging participants to adopt new technologies and methods that can enhance productivity while minimizing environmental impact.
- Creation of networking opportunities among youth, local businesses, educational institutions, and agricultural organizations.

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION



Rural4learning website: <https://www.rural4learning.eu/?redirect=0>

RuralWorlds Handbook

Catalogue of good practices of Italian NRN activities

Open farms video



Italy



**Council for agricultural
research and economics**
Paola Lionetti:
p.lionetti@masaf.gov.it

Watch this AKIS-in-Practice!

