

Addressing the current and Future skill needs for sustainability, digitalization and the bio-Economy in agricuLture: European skills agenDa and Strategy

FIELDS Project Exploitation Plan	
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fields ADDRESSING THE CURRENT AND FUTURE SKILL NEEDS FOR SUSTAINABILITY, DIGITALIZATION AND THE BIO-ECONOMY IN AGRICULTURE: EUROPEAN SKILLS AGENDA AND STRATEGY - AGREEMENT 612664-EPP-1-2019-1-IT-EPPKA2-SSA-B



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1. Summary

Project exploitation is linked to the utilization of the project outcomes following the project's execution and it is related with the necessary actions that will bring visibility to the project to involve target groups, end-users, stakeholders and transfer the results/products into their professionals' scope.

The exploitation approach of the Field Consortium focuses on various crucial elements, such as: i) recognizing results suitable for exploitation; ii) creating a plan for utilization; iii) metrics to assess the performance of the plan; iv) cooperation with other partnerships; and v) initial financial projections.

The implementation of this strategy will be carried out by project partners, at the exploitation stage members of the Pact for Skills Alliance. The exploitation plan presented here covers the initial four years of post-project, and subsequent annual updates are expected by the Project Coordinator and by the Steering group.

2. Introduction

2.1. Overview of the FIELDS project objectives and results

The aim of the FIELDS project is to contribute to skill enhancement of workers in the agriculture, food industry and forestry sectors, to be able to make full use of the opportunities and comply with requirements of the "Twin" Green and Digital transition. The FIELDS project focuses on the domains Digitalization, Sustainability, Bio-Economy and Management & Entrepreneurship. Skills include "hard"/ measurable and technology-based skills as well as "soft" / transversal skills.¹

The project designs strategies to provide knowledge transfer through training at EU and country level, to reach people in initial training and agri-food and forestry workers. Learners will be engaged with modular innovative training, flexible schedules, and the possibility to take only the skills they need.

However, to successfully address and react to these drivers, agri-food and forestry need new business models and skills. The identification of existing and emerging skills needs in bio-economy, sustainability and the use of digital technology, is of paramount importance in order to develop a strategic approach to keep the European agri-food and forestry sectors competitive and sustainable in the long term.

The multi-stakeholder approach in the FIELDS project, with 30 partners from 12 countries (HEI, VET providers, agricultural and forestry sector representatives and food industry) allows tackling the complexity of the issues these sectors face today.

¹ *The FIELDS project is consistent with main EU policies in the fields of sustainable and circular production. The European Green Deal, announced by the European Commission in December 2019, followed up on the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and COP21 (the UN climate change conference of 2015). It commits the EU to become climate-neutral by 2050 whilst promising to help companies to become world leaders in clean products and green technologies. It aims to boost the efficient use of resources by moving to a clean, circular economy while restoring biodiversity and cutting pollution. The Green Deal encompasses a New Circular Economy Action Plan, a Sustainable Europe Investment Plan, a Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and, a new Farm to Fork strategy on sustainable food throughout the value chain (EU-Green Deal, 2021).*

Within the FIELDS partners, working groups with specialists in each sector (Agriculture, Food Industry, and Forestry) and each area of the project (Sustainability, Digitalization, Bioeconomy, Entrepreneurship) were created to assess missing skills.

The identified skill and knowledge gaps led to the creation of new in “Occupational Profiles” describing the employment requirement for future Operators (EQF level 4) and Technicians (EQF level 5) in each of the three employment sectors and within areas of Bioeconomy, Sustainability, Digitalization and Business Entrepreneurship and Soft Skills.

These profiles were then matched with ESCO criteria and they served as a basis for next tasks of the project, the creation of Curricula and Training content.

Beyond these training initiatives, the project developed several databases and, in order to facilitate the dissemination of information and services, established two web platforms:

1. FIELDS website, providing information on project objectives, partners, communication materials, activities, and open deliverables, including access to relevant databases.
2. FIELDS e-Platform which hosts and allows access to training materials.

2.2. Aims of the FIELDS exploitation strategy

One of the tasks in the FIELDS project (task 5.3) is the development of an exploitation strategy with the aims of setting up a plan for the further exploitation of the project outcomes and also of linking up with the recently established Agri-food Pact for Skills, spearheaded by the European association for the food and drink industry, FoodDrinkEurope, and the European association of cooperatives and farmers, Copa-Cogeca.

The FIELDS exploitation strategy focuses on several key aspects, including:

1. **Increasing visibility and networking** among project partners
2. **Expanding the use of the e-platform** (4 years after the Project)
3. **Disseminating training content** for different target users
4. **Continuous improvement of training Material** (in line with the governance structures)
5. **Definition and monitoring of exploitation KPIs**
6. **Updating the relevant e-platforms, websites and data-bases as is required.**

3. Key exploitable results

The initial phase in formulating the exploitation strategy involves pinpointing the project's crucial exploitable results (KERs). These refer to the outcomes produced throughout the project that possess utility and can generate an impact, either for the project partners or other stakeholders involved.

Table 1 outlines the identified KERs of the FIELDS project, presenting their respective descriptions and associated deliverables (accessible links provided when made public).

Table 1. FIELDS Key Exploitable Results (KERs)

Exploitable result	Description	Related deliverables	Dissemination Level
Focus group analysis	This report contains information on identified needed skills, training needs and best methods to deliver training at European and national level.	D1.5	Restricted to other E+ Programme participants
Survey analysis	FIELDS survey on skill needs. These findings are complementary to the focus groups report.	D1.7	Confidential, for members of the consortium
Scenarios analysis	Report on skill needs scenarios for EU agriculture, food industry and forestry sectors, based on the analysis of socio-economic trends impacting on these sectors and specified for the dimensions sustainability, digitalisation, bio-economy and business models.	D1.8	Public
Occupational profiles	Description of 10 newly identified occupational profiles for the Agriculture, Food Industry and Forestry sectors. Profiles presented in ESCO format: essential and optional knowledge and skills.	D2.1	Confidential, for members of the consortium

European Strategy	European strategy for skills enhancement in the Agriculture, Food Industry and Forestry sectors	D2.3	Public
National Roadmaps	Report on 7 national roadmaps for the implementation of the FIELDS European strategy for skills enhancement: Austria, France, Finland, Italy, The Netherlands, Spain and Ireland.	D2.4	Public
Open transferability framework	This report contains guidelines and references to allow transferability of some project outputs (occupational profiles, curricula, trainings, strategies and roadmaps) within Europe.	D2.5	Restricted to other E+ Programme participants
Curricula	Detailed curricula information for the occupational profiles created in the project	D3.2	Public
Fields PLATFORM related KER			
Online public platform and map	The data-bases will be online inside the project website and will contain all information about the VET providers, the HEI, the curricula, the funding opportunities, etc.	D4.3	Public

Repository of previous projects and best practices	This online repository gathers relevant project outputs, best practices, policies, initiatives, classified into a database, allowing customised research. It also contains a summary about the findings	D1.2	Restricted to other E+ Programme participants
VET and stakeholders lists and classification	The database registers and indexes the stakeholders, VET provider	D1.3	Restricted to other E+ Programme participants
Regulatory framework list	The report lists regulatory framework relevant to the project continuation or use of results	D5.1	Public
Funding opportunity list	Report listing all funding opportunities to promote the training and skills uptake	D5.2	Public
Project website	The project website will be maintained by Project coordinator UNITO after the project end. It includes relevant information for exploitation purposes, such as news on project activities, public deliverables, communication materials (newsletter) and links to the FIELDS PLATFORM and Pact for skills website.	D7.2	Public

4. Exploitation Roadmap

The objective of this section is to outline the actions aimed at exploiting the KERs, specifying the target users, timelines, and the partners accountable for the exploitation efforts. These activities have been categorized into three distinct actions.

4.1. Stakeholders engagement. ACTION 1.

Main target: stakeholders from the agriculture, food industry forestry sectors

- Education & Training providers: VET schools, higher education institutions, other educational and training providers.
- Policy makers: EP, DG EAC, DG EMPL, DG AGRI, DG GROW, DG ENVI, DG SANTE, national and European Food Safety authorities, Ministries of Education, regional governments, regulatory bodies.
- Decision makers: farmers, cooperatives, foresters, food companies, forestry-based companies, retailers, consumers
- Advocacy: representative bodies (e.g. Copa-Cogeca, FoodDrinkEurope, CEPI, ETPs, Pact for Skills, Croplife, Fertilizers Europe, CEMA, CEJA), advisers, coops, unions, chamber of agriculture, student societies, industry federations, NFTPs, national entrepreneurial federations, consumers, chambers of commerce and citizenship organizations/NGOs, civil society organizations in education and training, organizations that advocate for sustainable land-use, regional and sectoral employment agencies
- European level VET support organizations: EfVET, LLLP, Cedefop, EIP-agri, safe and sustainable food system partnership (SSFS), ASIIN, EQAS, EQAVET

Main activities: Pact for Skills.

The Pact for Skills initiative brings together all types and sizes of stakeholders, including EU social partners, EU umbrella organisations, companies, vocational and education training providers and public authorities. Its objective is ensuring the highest quality possible of vocational education and training, and up- and reskilling of the European workforce in all the ecosystems of the EU Industrial Strategy, including the agri-food ecosystem. This effort is undertaken with the aim of meeting the objectives of the twin green and digital transition, as well as attracting and retaining the workforce and improving working conditions.

Investment and alignment of initiatives are needed throughout Member States to provide the right education and skills needed by the ecosystem today and tomorrow. The Pact for Skills represents an opportunity to upskill and reskill the current workforce and make the agri-food ecosystem more attractive to young people, while providing a career and life-long learning perspective to both employers and workers.

To achieve this, the partnership aims to set a joint strategy to design and implement a sectoral education, training, upskilling and reskilling framework, maximising competitiveness of all the actors involved, with the aim to enhance job retention and job attractiveness of the agri-food ecosystem within the context of the Pact for Skills. The partnership aims to develop the means to monitor the specific Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that will measure progress towards these goals and help overcome the challenges identified.

This framework shall ensure that farms and food companies continue to adapt to the labour market. It aims to adjust to technical developments, develop human resources, secure employment, increase attractiveness, increase integration and retention of workers, and to develop competences, improve employability, and maintain internal and labour market opportunities. The training provided shall be of high quality, close to the needs of the companies and the workers. It will build on the longstanding VET activities on diverse levels: national, regional and company level. It shall take into account the different existing systems, particularly those driven, developed and implemented by social partners.

The partnership will develop a roadmap towards this ambition. For support, it will use resources from concluded Erasmus+ projects such as FooD-STAA and ASKFOOD, from active projects such as the Erasmus+ projects FIELDS and I-RESTART, and current initiatives such as EIT-Food activities. It will also benefit from support services provided by the European Commission. It will aim to use the social dialogue framework to develop and implement the strategy at all levels. The purpose is to reach all the relevant stakeholders in the agri-food ecosystem: from farmers, agri-food cooperatives, food processors, and relevant associations, to education and training organisations. The Pact for Skills partnership shall provide actions, accompanied by KPIs to assess its impact.

With the above commitments and implementing actions, the partnership aims to ensure that the agri-food ecosystem delivers:

- Sectoral cooperation for up- and reskilling actions and monitoring;
- Inclusion in the Pact of relevant public authorities/bodies;
- Systematic EU-wide recognition of skills and knowledge;
- EU-wide mutually accepted definitions of skills and job roles;
- Competences categorized by targeted occupational profiles;
- Developed skills needs, pathways and training for the sectors with the help of Commission Support Services and agencies, employer organizations and trade unions;
- High-level quality of training, based on e.g. European guidelines on quality assurance

The PACT FOR SKILLS will be implemented by:

- Developing partnerships between education and training organizations, business operators, and business support organizations, to overcome the skills gap;
- Continuing the efforts of social partners at different levels in this respect and developing new partnerships, bodies, dialogue, agreements, or targeted actions with social partners;
- Developing actions for up- and reskilling in the ecosystem;
- Mobilizing students and trainees across the EU for better training;
- Highlighting the relevance of vocational education and training (VET), including apprenticeships, as well as of life-long learning across the EU;
- Ensuring better communication around the attractiveness of the agri-food ecosystem in order to attract young generations and experts to fulfill new job roles linked to the challenges faced by the ecosystem;
- Taking special care SMEs, for a better alignment of their specific skills needs;
- Aligning and communicating amongst the employers, employer associations, workers and trade unions (social dialogue) and the education and training organizations.

FIELDS will benefit from the pact for skills, since it will be a channel for direct communication of the project results and will enable the engagement of pact members in the use of the project outcomes.

Specific activities for this action:

- Promote the P4S website
- Communicate P4S aims and activities through social media
- Webinars to promote P4S activities and engage new members

4.2. FIELDS Digital Resources exploitation. ACTION 2.

The FIELDS Platform will serve as a facilitator of the FIELDS outcomes exploitation. The platform offers:

- A set of comprehensive databases on Online public platform and map, Repository of previous projects and best practices, VET and stakeholders lists and classification, Regulatory framework list and Funding opportunity list open to general public and free of use.
- An online map of agrifood and forestry stakeholders (education providers, sectorial associations, etc.) across Europe, which serves as a basis for cooperation
- Flexible sharing of knowledge and resources to strengthen skills development
- Increased visibility of the FIELDS project partners. EU wide brand development and network.
- Adaptability for a potential future integration into the Agri-food Pact for Skills platform
- It can be integrated in and sustained by future educational projects (e.g. ERASMUS+, HORIZON...)

An important task to implement within this action is the governance of the FIELDS platform. Figure 1 shows a schematic representation of the platform governance structure.

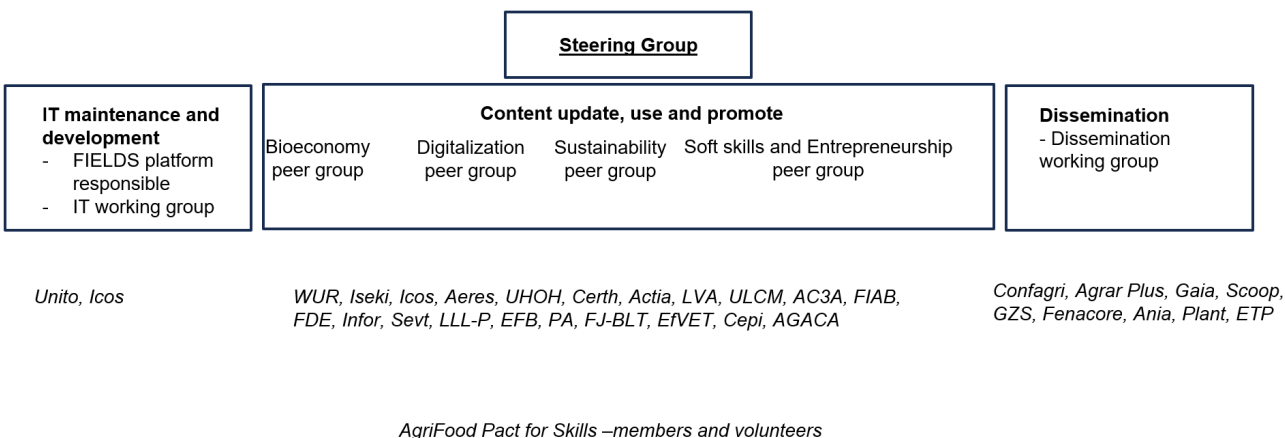


Figure 1. Schematic representation of the FIELDS platform governance structure.

The purpose of the Steering Group is to ensure the seamless cohesion of the different parts of the FIELDS digital platform. The FIELDS project coordinators Unito and Confagricoltura have a stable role in the steering group. Unito chairs and Confagricoltura co-chairs the steering group.

The different subgroups (IT working group, Bioeconomy peer group, Sustainability peer group, Digitalisation peer group, Soft skills and entrepreneurship peer group, dissemination working group) will each appoint a group leader, who will act as a member of the Digital Platform Steering Group for a period of one or two years.

An additional active participant in the AgriFood Pact for Skills will be invited to the Steering Group.

The Steering Group will elect a secretary to support the work of the group.

The Steering Group will meet online at least twice a year. The Steering Group decides on the meeting modalities among themselves. This group has potential to be integrated with AgriFood Pact of Skills.

The subgroups agree among themselves and in consultation with the Steering Group on their responsibilities and mandates.

Platform governance scheme to be updated be-yearly (if necessary) or at any other point the steering committee sees it is needed.

Specific activities for this action:

(Copied from table1)

- Promote the use of digital resources through the FIELDS website and databases
- Use social media to disseminate the project digital resources

4.3. Exploitation of training activities and materials. ACTION 3.

Main target stakeholders: VET institutions, higher education institutions, food companies, food professionals, students.

Timeline: JUNE 2024- JUNE 2028

This action includes the exploitation of: i) the training content available in the platform; ii) all the curricula developed in the project.

Activities:

- Maintenance of the modules on the Moodle platform.
- Regularly review and update the training modules to incorporate the latest advancements and trends in sustainability, bioeconomy, digitalisation, business-entrepreneurship and soft skills for the agri-food and forestry sectors.
- Dissemination of the modules by all FIELDS members.
- Reporting on how the in-person trainings have been included in the educational programmes of VET institutions and Universities.

FIELDS VET partners are responsible for the training content update, use and promotion during the project. After the project, the updating, use and promotion of the content will be open to all interested parties who respect the rules for users of the digital platform.

It is important to update the training materials. Training materials that are used on a European scale are an excellent way to promote one's expertise and to be recognized as a relevant actor of the sector.

If a training organization finds a need to update the materials, they can suggest changes.

In the initial phase, the organizations that have managed the different modules of the training materials will form a peer review group for the module concerned.

These groups will review the material submitted for publication and make a recommendation on whether or not to publish the material. The decision is taken by the Steering Group.

Module specific peer groups (Bioeconomy, Digitalisation, Sustainability, Soft skills and entrepreneurship) can be joined on the basis of personal interest. They will choose a group leader among themselves, who will be a member of the Steering Group.

At least three organisations should be involved in each peer group.

In the event of a new member joining or leaving, the matter will be discussed in the Steering Group.

Specific activities for this action:

- Promotion of training materials and their use through social media
- Promotion of training materials and their use through webinars

5. Key performance indicators

To assess the effectiveness of executing the exploitation plan, the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) shown in Table 1 will be considered. The Steering Group outlined in the Platform Governance (Action 2) will be responsible for assessing the good performance of the exploitation plan by monitoring this KPIs, and corrective measures on the roadmap activities will be implemented if needed. For this purpose, FIELDS Project consortium members bear the responsibility of documenting their exploitation actions (dissemination of events for stakeholder engagement, platform and Training dissemination, Pact for skills activities).

Table 1: Key Performance Indicators for Project exploitation

Activity	KPI	June 2026	June 2028
Action 1: Stakeholder engagement			
Pact4Skills website	New visitors	200	400
PACT FOR SKILLS	Number of institutional members after June 2024	20	40
Social Media on Pact for skills	Number of LinkedIn posts	12	24
FIELDS outcomes promotional webinars	Number of webinars	2	4
FIELDS outcomes promotional webinars	Participants/webinar	30	30
Action 2: FIELDS Digital Resources exploitation			
FIELDS Website	New visitors	100	200
Databases	Webpage visitors	50	100
Social media on Fields project digital resources	Number of LinkedIn posts	12	24
Action 3: Exploitation of training activities and materials.			
Training Modules	New registered users on the e-learning platform	50	100
Training material online	Number of downloads	100	200
Social media on training resources	Number of LinkedIn posts	12	24
Training promotional webinars	Number of webinars	2	4
Training promotional webinars	Participants/webinar	30	30

6. Preliminary financial forecast

6.1 Revenue streams

The potential sources of revenue are outlined as follows:

- **EU/National (co)funded projects:** Projects present a valuable opportunity to develop new outputs or enhance existing ones. The FIELDS coordinator will regularly assess funding opportunities and inform the Consortium's Partners about relevant calls. The decision to pursue a proposal will involve identifying partners with the requisite capacity and knowledge. Emphasis will be placed on opportunities like ERASMUS+ calls, particularly those falling under Key Action 2, "Cooperation among organisations and institutions." Although no revenues are anticipated from funding opportunities in 2024, they could become a significant source from 2025 onward.
- **Paid services:** Certain Key Exploitable Results (KERs) may involve fees, such as training modules. Revenue from training in each partner country university is not anticipated for the Fields Partners and Pact for skills members. The online training material will be available for free, but subsequent updates may be subject to fees.
- **Investors/Sponsors:** Another potential revenue stream involves funds from interested parties (industry, EU institutions, academies, research bodies, etc.) willing to invest (equity and/or debt) in the overall operations of specific initiatives, such as identifying skill needs, conducting training activities, and organizing promotional events.

6.2 Costs

- **Platform Maintenance:** this involves expenses associated with domain maintenance and content updates. Staff costs for this maintenance, totalling less than one hour per week, will be borne by UNITO.
- **Maintenance of Online Courses and Materials:** placed on the FIELDS e-learning platform, technical maintenance will be managed by UNITO, while updates to courses and materials will be overseen by the partners responsible for each specific course or content.
- **Tools for Online Events:** platforms such as Zoom and Teams will utilize the accounts of Fields partners, also members of the P4S.
- **Other Personnel Costs:** these expenditures are linked to additional FIELDS and/or PACT FOR SKILLS activities related to the exploitation of FIELDS results, such as mapping and preparation of project proposals, Social Media promotion of FIELDS results, organization of online promotional events, etc. These costs will be covered by the former FIELDS partners now in the P4S.

7. Dissemination and Continuous improvement

Partners will disseminate project information in line with the exploitation plan.

Dissemination working group will present recommendations to the steering group, which will decide whether to proceed according to the recommendation or not.

At least three organizations should be involved in the dissemination working group. The commitment to the dissemination working group is for a period of four years post project. In the event of a new member joining or leaving, the matter will be discussed in the Steering Group.

Active community participation in the e-learning platform is encouraged by providing channels for user feedback, suggestions, and discussions such as a blog section, which will serve as a basis for interactions and creation of communities of practice. To be considered: utilizing forums, surveys, or specific feedback mechanisms to promote an inclusive environment and encourage collaboration between users and blog/forum administrators.

The exploitation plan continuous improvement is overseen by the steering group. The steering group's role is to regularly examine and evaluate the effectiveness of both the governance system and the exploitation plan.

The steering group seeks feedback from users, monitors how the training material is used, and adjusts the governance framework accordingly to continuously improve the exploitation plan.



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