

## **New approaches to communicate with farmers: Enhancing social learning processes for soil and water conservation in Switzerland**

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Bridging the gap between scientific analysis and farmer action is a major challenge when implementing soil and water conservation measures (SWC). On the basis of the comparison between scientific and farmer perception of soil the innovative and transdisciplinary implementation project "From Farmer to Farmer" was conducted in the midlands of Switzerland 2002 - 2009.

The main ideas of the approach are the following: In a first step arguments of farmers are worked out by means of interviews and film. These farmers have successfully implemented soil conserving methods in collaboration with soil scientists during several years. By doing so the aims, methods and contexts of farmer work are integrated (Fry 2001). Five short films have been produced: "From plowing to direct drilling", "mulch seeding", "strip tilling", "direct drilling" and "soil regeneration and activation". The films show people working at the farm, special machines during action and crop in several stages. The experience and specific language of farmers enhances the credibility and enables a personal identification. In a second step these videos are shown at informal farmer assemblies as well as at agricultural schools in order to trigger social learning processes.

The project also bridges the gap between scientists and practitioners by building and organizing an accompanying group – a trading zone - which consists of all relevant actor groups, institutions of agriculture and soil protection as well as several agricultural associations. All these actors accompany the production of the films. This group meets regularly and in a way that all the actors can interact freely.

The project is supported by two federal departments - agriculture and environment -, all the cantons as well as four farmer organizations. The pilot phase started in 2002 testing the project steps. The main phase lasted from 2003 to 2007. Until the beginning of 2010 three additional films are produced and introduced to the farmers.

The project was accompanied by researchers from the University of Berne. Their findings show that this innovative way of communicating with farmers is effective on several levels (Schneider et al. 2009).