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Lithuania

Lithuanian Living Lab: Women Farmers Driving Innovation in Small-Scale and Sustainable Agriculture

Introduction

The Lithuanian Living Lab (LL) was implemented across different regions of the country with the aim of supporting eight rural women farmers in developing and applying innovations within their farms and businesses. The participants represented a wide range of agricultural and processing activities: from vegetable growing and beekeeping to mushroom cultivation, herbal product creation, and the preservation of culinary heritage. This summary presents the main outcomes of the Lithuanian LL, focusing on how the participants strengthened their identity as innovators, interacted with various stakeholders, and developed collective learning and collaboration processes that emerged throughout the project.

Case study results and learnings

Composition and organisation of the Living Lab

The Lithuanian LL brought together eight rural women from different regions of the country, representing a wide diversity of activities – from organic vegetable growing, beekeeping, and shiitake mushroom cultivation to herbal blends, candle-making, elements of culinary heritage, and handcrafted value-added products. The participants varied significantly in age, experience, education, and farm size – from newcomers to experienced entrepreneurs with established brands. What united them was a shared motivation to improve their businesses, introduce new products, and strengthen their role in their local communities. The LL activities included group discussions, hands-on sessions, and topic-specific guidance provided in response to participants' interests. Face-to-face meetings were highly valued for fostering trust, peer learning, and open dialogue. A flexible and participant-centred approach allowed the sessions to adapt to women's real needs, while ongoing communication through online channels supported continuity and collaboration beyond formal meetings.

Innovation process and observed changes

At the start of the project, the women were at very different stages of their innovation journeys – some were only shaping ideas, while others were already testing or commercialising new products. The LL acted as a catalyst for these processes, providing guidance, structure, and a supportive environment for developing and implementing innovations. Training sessions and mentoring followed the stages of innovation development, offering practical advice that helped participants make faster and more confident decisions.



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Through this collaborative and iterative process, even those initially hesitant towards certain tools or approaches began to experiment, adapt, and apply new methods. The experience fostered greater openness, creativity, and courage to take initiative – qualities that became visible in their daily activities and business practices.

Stakeholder interaction

Stakeholder engagement in the LL took place through multiple and complementary forms. Experts were invited based on the specific needs expressed by women participants, covering topics such as digital technologies, business development, media visibility, and leadership in the agri-food sector. Some sessions were integrated into broader national or regional events, allowing participants to connect with public institutions, policymakers, and innovation networks. Others involved local actors, such as representatives of community initiatives and associations, who shared practical insights on activating local resources and promoting cooperation in rural areas. Academic and research experts also contributed by linking practice to theory and encouraging critical reflection on gender, innovation, and sustainability. This flexible and demand-driven approach created meaningful exchanges between women and experts, expanding their professional networks, strengthening self-confidence, and enhancing their understanding of rural development opportunities.

Perceptions and collective learning

The Lithuanian LL was experienced as a new and transformative learning environment for women farmers. For most participants, it was the first time they were involved in a structured innovation process within agriculture. The LL format proved to be an effective tool to stimulate reflection, creativity, and collaboration, helping women recognise their own capacity to innovate and to see their farming activities from new perspectives. The women especially valued the sense of community, the exchange of experiences, and the opportunity to discuss their challenges in a trusted and supportive environment. They highlighted that expert guidance and peer discussions helped them overcome doubts and encouraged them to take concrete steps in their innovation paths. Participants expressed a strong desire to continue the collaboration network established during the project. Ensuring the continuity of this network would allow the sharing of knowledge, strengthening of cooperation, and further dissemination of innovations across different rural contexts in Lithuania.

Conclusion

The Lithuanian case confirms that the LL approach is an effective and innovative tool to support women-led entrepreneurship and innovation in agriculture. It provided a flexible, inclusive, and practice-oriented environment that encouraged reflection, experimentation, and collaboration among women farmers at different stages of their innovation journeys. The participating experts played a key role in maintaining motivation and building confidence. The experience highlighted the need for long-term, context-sensitive support systems combining technical advice, mentoring, and networking opportunities. Participants also emphasised the importance of balancing work and family responsibilities and improving access to rural services. Strengthening women's institutional representation in agricultural decision-making and sustaining the network created through the project would be crucial to ensure continuity and lasting impact of women-led innovations in rural Lithuania.

Location:

Lithuania

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More info:

<https://www.grassceiling.eu/living-labs/lithuania/>

Relevant social media posts during the project or public engagement in media outlets:

LSMC EKVI website news – <https://www.ekvi.lt/en/news>

LSMC EKVI Facebook page –

https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61564715920278&locale=lt_LT

AgriFood Lithuania Facebook page – https://www.facebook.com/AgriFood.lt?locale=lt_LT

Articles in the Lithuanian Agricultural Advisory Service monthly journal for the agricultural sector "Mano Ūkis":

„The Role of Women in European Agriculture” (2024/02) – featuring the case of women innovator Lina Vyšniauskaitė. <https://www.ekvi.lt/mokslinis-projektas/europos-horizontas-projektas-grass-ceiling-lyciu-lygybe-kaimo-ir-zemes-ukio-inovaciju-sistemose>

“Beekeeping in Lithuania Revives” (2025/07) – featuring the case of women innovator Justė Jankauskienė. <https://manoukis.lt/mano-ukis-zurnalas/2025/07/bitininkyste-lietuvoje-atgimsta/>

“Greenhouse Crop Production – from Bed to Shelf” (2025/08) – featuring the case of women innovator Rasa Prusakova <https://manoukis.lt/mano-ukis-zurnalas/2025/08/nuo-lysves-iki-lentynos/>

Radio Interview with LL participants “Women in agriculture: balancing family and business” – 2024 <https://www.lrt.lt/radioteka/irasas/2000378365/moterys-zemes-ukio-versle-balansavimas-tarp-seimos-ir-verslo-poreikiu>

Scientific publication: Dabkienė, V.; Šikšnelytė-Butkienė, I.; Štreimikienė, D.; Šapolaitė, V.; Baležentis, T. (2025). From Glass to Grass Ceiling: Addressing Gender Barriers in Agricultural Innovation. Technological Forecasting and Social Change (Elsevier), Vol. 212, 123957. DOI: 10.1016/j.techfore.2024.123957, sub-sections 4.2-4.3.



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