

# STORY OF THE CASE

## ‘Farmers at a Crossroads’ (Belgium)





## 1 The Story of the Case

### 1.1 The story of 'Farmers at a Crossroads'

Overall we can tell that being a farmer is a tough job. It is more than just economic reasons that keep them running, but also passion for the job and for some seen as an obligation to take over from generation to generation.

Already for years we see a decrease in the number of farmers, those who stay get bigger, also with higher financial risks, connected to a more volatile market, changing climate conditions and stricter legislation.

We also recognise that the farmer's life-work balance seems to be disappearing, work and family have always been interlinked and when difficulty arises, taking distance from the problem is more difficult. Moreover, asking for (social/psychological) help is still seen as a failure. Farming families out of shame or pride tend to keep their issues indoors. Working harder is still seen as the solution to problems.

Already 15 years ago, Farmers at a Crossroads was started in Flanders with a social innovation for Farmers. Thanks to financial help of the Flemish Government a helpline was installed, easy to use and easy to reach 24/24 7/7. This helpline is open for all farmers, free of charge and dealing with different problems linked with farming.

However we recently noticed that the helpline was mainly used when farmers really didn't see any other possibility than stopping and/or getting bankrupt. Calling to the help desk was perceived as being at the end of your career, looking for a way to sell your farm and only looking at accounting figures and values. At the same time research showed that the suicide rate among farmers was much more higher than the rest of the population.

All this led to the need of optimizing /rethinking the helpline and gave birth to a new and recent social innovation, a workshop on learning a language to make problems debatable / recognisable. All this with the purpose of reaching out and connecting to farmers before it's too late, in the stage that help can still provide solutions, farmers can still change their business concept, economic and social innovations can still help to overcome problems and have a positive impact on the well-being of the farmers.

Therefore Famers at a crossroads developed a workshop making problems at the farm recognisable/debatable by gatekeepers , helping them to start the debate, pushing the famer gently to the helpline when there is still time. At the same time a workshop is developed for farmers making them more open for discussing and speaking about their problems with fellow farmers, partners and/or gatekeepers. Calling the helpline must be seen as inscribing for a management course, calling a specific farmer advisor for help and/or talking to another farmer for professional advice. This without any limitation on the topic. Without shame but





as a proof of business concern and professionalism. Farmers at a crossroads will then coach the whole journey of change and will invite advisors/consultants where needed.

After this innovation we now see an enormous increase (doubling each year, 300 in 2022) in calls, making it necessary to upgrade the service with extra consultants. An increase of budget from the Flemish Government has been approved, because the need for this social innovation was shown by the latest impact figures.

This is the reason why both the helpdesk & the workshop are integrated within this Case Study.

## 1.2 The story of FARMWELL

In the first meetings with stakeholders that we held within the FARMWELL project in the practice group meetings, Farmers at a Crossroads was an evident invitee. A practice group is a group of stakeholders (in this case of wellbeing in agriculture), consisting of farmers, policy makers, farm advisors, and help organisations. During these meetings the taboo regarding talking about problems came up and also the social innovation by Farmers at a crossroads, which is the training to make problems debatable. Farmers at a crossroads then only gave that training to farmers when it was part of an event with a different theme, as not to scare farmers off. It was clear from the beginning that this was a very sensitive topic. With the Flemish FARMWELL team we felt this was a very relevant social innovation to add to the project and we chose this social innovation for piloting. We were bold in our approach: the whole pilot, an inspiration tour or academy on tour, visiting with a bus full of farmers 3 different farms and receiving training on the bus, was dedicated to working on your own wellbeing as a farmer. We were wondering whether we would get any response to our invitations, by Boerenbond (see invitation below) and by Ferm. For Boerenbond this was a very explicit invitation regarding the theme of wellbeing. To our surprise and great satisfaction, the bus was full! Despite our efforts to attract male farmers (technical explanations during farm visits, a sturdy cow on the invitation, our suggestion to participate as a couple), it was the wives who participated, but at least they were many.





**Inspiratietoer**

**Welbevinden loont: vat je innerlijke koe bij de horens**

Maandag 14 november, ganse dag  
Bustoe langs 3 heel verschillende bedrijven met 3 heel persoonlijke verhalen in West- en Oost-Vlaanderen

Investeren doet op termijn opbrengen. Maar wat is ook dat investeren in jezelf loont? Onderzoek toont aan dat de mentale druk bij landbouwers hoog ligt. Logisch, de intense vervevenheid die je als landbouwer ervaart tussen je job en je gezin. In combinatie met een hoop andere factoren, maken dat het moeilijk kan zijn de horevelheid hooi op je vork onder controle te houden. Wij gaan samen met jou op pad om te leren over de voordelen van het aan de slag gaan met je eigen welzijn. Per bus bezoeken we 3 bedrijven die concreet vertellen hoe zij de stress van alledag aanpakken en hoe hun benadering hen winst oplevert. Naast de gepresenteerd krijg je ook theorie aangereikt. Experient uit het vak lichten tijdens de busrit han inzichten toe, die je kant bespreken met je collega deelnemers. Want op het einde van de rit is dat belangrijk praten werkt.

**Programma**

9 uur  
Bedrijfsbezoek bij Ter Paddepoole, Rolakotde straat 18, Maldegem: melkvee en educatie

13 uur  
Verrassingslunch en bedrijfsbezoek bij d'Yzerpasserelle te Alveringem: varkens en B&B

16:30 uur  
Bedrijfsbezoek bij 't Geysenhof te Gistel-Zevokote: akkerbouw, melkvee, varkens, eerste kleine windmolen

19 uur  
Afsluiting in Maldegem

De inspiratietoer vindt plaats onder de vorm van een busreis. Aangezien de theorie op de bus zal worden gegeven, is het sterk aangeraden met de bus mee te rijden. Opstapen kan op carpoolparking Antwerpen West en Beveren en bij Ter Paddepoole in Maldegem.

**Inschrijven en kostprijs**

Toer is gratis, maar vooraf inschrijven is verplicht en kan tot 30/10 via [deze link](#). Indien je je met je partner wilt inschrijven, vul het formulier dan 2x in.

Meer weten?  
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**BOEREN BOND**

Boerenbond organiseert de inspiratietoer in samenwerking met

De project heeft ondersteuning van de Europese Unie voor de periode 2014-2020

Ferm voor agrarvrouwen **ILVO** **BOEREN BOND**

**Inspiratietoer welbevinden**

**Maandag 14 november**

**Drie verschillende bedrijven met drie heel persoonlijke verhalen in West- en Oost-Vlaanderen**

Samen met experten in het thema organiseren we een unieke bustrip met inspiratie en tools

- 9u Bedrijfsbezoek Ter Paddepoole in Maldegem
- 13u Verrassingslunch en bedrijfsbezoek bij d'Yzerpasserelle in Alveringem
- 16u30 Bedrijfsbezoek bij 't Geysenhof in Zevokote
- 19u Afsluiting in Maldegem

**BOEREN BOND** **ILVO** **Ferm voor agrarvrouwen** **BOEREN OP EEN KRUISPOST**

De inspiratietoer is gratis, maar vooraf inschrijven is verplicht en kan [via deze link](#). Meer info via [evos@samenferm.be](mailto:evos@samenferm.be) of 0472 18 63 87.

If you would like to learn more about this Social Innovation and about the process and findings we went through in FARMWELL (Pilot Action -> Social Return On Investment (SROI) -> Policy Recommendations) please click on the other tools in the matrix or read the rest of our study on the [Belgian Country Page](#).

