
MANUAL

Profiling farmers and farmers' facebook

This manual is linked to the guide 'Optimising the Performance of Producers and their Organisations'

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About the tool

The tool is indicated for anybody interested to know and understand farmers better and learn from their experiences and points of view, to share and use these for farmer-inclusive development purposes. It has a double purpose:

1. listening to farmers, learning from them, seeing realities from their perspective and
2. giving farmers a face.

The tool encourages you to visit farmers, and to collect first-hand information to describe their livelihoods, achievements, challenges and ambitions.

A checklist of possible questions helps you to get information that you might otherwise miss. The tool is flexible and can be tailored to the situation at hand. The output of this tool are farmer profiles and/or farmer life histories, which can be put together in a farmer 'facebook'.

It is always important to listen and learn from farmers, and it is always useful to create short documents that give farmers a voice and a face. In the OPPO approach, which puts farmers central, farmer profiling is a first important step when preparing for the design of a farmer-inclusive programme. Farmer profiles and farmers' Facebooks can be specifically used for the following purposes: farmer consultation, identification of challenges and opportunities, programme design, management and evaluation, communication, lobby and advocacy.



Aims of the tool:

- ❖ **To get into the shoes of farmers, seeing realities from their perspectives.**
- ❖ **To listen to farmers and to learn about their daily realities, achievements, assessments, challenges and ambitions, leading to a deeper situation analysis.**
- ❖ **To design farmer-inclusive agribusiness programmes on the basis of farmers' proposals and suggestions.**
- ❖ **To give farmers a face.**
- ❖ **To be aware about biases towards farmers.**

Background

Why profiling farmers

Stories of family farmers can raise awareness about their importance in society and highlight the challenges they face. Family farmers are many and diverse. 500 million farmers produce more than

80% of the world's food and occupy 70-80% of the earth's farmland. In addition, they play an important role in safeguarding biodiversity, environment and culture. They are key to support rural economies and to create sustainable and resilient food systems. Yet, they are often poor and food-insecure themselves. Remarkably, farmers are not listened to, heard nor seen. Understanding farmers' daily lives and actions and knowing about their needs and suggestions for change helps to identify actions for improving their livelihoods and for keeping a focus on farmer ownership and farmer empowerment.



"Tell me a fact and I'll learn. Tell me a truth and I'll believe. But tell me a story and it will live in my heart forever."

Native American Proverb.

In 2019, the FAO has launched the decade of family farming (2019-2028; <http://fao.org/family-farming/decade/en>). In this context, FAO states that stories are needed to showcase one or more of the following aspects:

- How family farming contributes to supporting the economy and/or protecting biodiversity, environment, or cultural heritage in a specific place.
- How family farmers are coping with challenges like climate change and/or outward migration from rural areas, and its effects on their communities.
- Innovations from family farmers and traditional knowledge that is applied to solve modern problems.
- The next generation of farmers: what is the reality for today's young farmers and how can youth be employed in the agricultural sector at large?
- The female farmers: while women hold only 15% of farmland, they perform about 50% of the labour on farms, they are engaged in processing and marketing activities and are of prime importance for improving children's food and nutrition.
- The diversity of family farmers (including fisher folk, pastoralists, mountain farmers, indigenous people, and others).
- Contributions of family farmers to food and nutrition in urban areas.

Profiling farmers is for getting stories about the contributions of family farming, the diversity of farmers and the challenges they face.

Showing farmers as actors

Profiling farmers is also about giving farmers a face, by showing them as actors. Farmer profiles are stories of individuals or households who find themselves in a certain situation and who seek to conduct farming and related activities as best as they can. It is about people who have clear ideas about main challenges and top priorities for changing their context and lives for the better.

Farmer profiles and farmer facebook

Farmer profiles and farmer life histories

A farmer profile is based on a face-to-face interview with a member of a family farmer household. It concentrates on specific/personal circumstances, considerations, reflections, decisions, questions and challenges of the farmer or farmer household that is profiled. The output is a profile of an individual farmer.

A farmer or farmer household life history is a specific form of farmer profile, focusing on 'Most significant change' in the life of the farmer or the farmer household. It is suggested to limit yourself to the past 5-15 years. While providing specific information on the farmer or farmer household itself, a farmer life history helps to understand how farmers coped with change and/or how specific events had an impact on the behaviour and decision-making of farmers.

Farmer profiles and/or life histories can be made occasionally, for instance after a farmer visit. They can also be used to illustrate farmers' lives and realities in an article or report. When used occasionally, sampling is not necessary. It is however important to ask yourself if the farmer you present is a good representative of the general farmer population or a special case.

Farmer facebook

A Farmer 'facebook' is a collection of several farmer profiles and/or farmer life histories in one document. This can be for a specific commodity (for instance maize or coffee). Farmers' organisations (for instance a primary cooperative, a Union operating at Province level or a national federation) can consider making a facebook of their members. It can also be done for a provincial, national or regional farmers' platform that is not commodity-specific.

Collecting many stories, farmer profiles and/or life histories, of different categories of farmers can be particularly useful for showing a more representative picture of farmers' livelihoods and challenges. Analysis of key elements that are recurring in many farmer stories is particularly useful for detecting most important challenges and opportunities.

When you make a farmer Facebook, make sure that there is a diversity of farmers' circumstances: male and female farmers; young and older farmers; small and larger farms; farmers from different parts of the country or region, farmers from highlands and lowlands or diversity according to other parameters. In case a more or less representative gallery of farmer profiles is foreseen, some sort of sampling is required.

Profiling farmers – how to do it

In the next paragraphs, we suggest the steps for preparing farmer profiles, collecting information and telling the story. The steps are the following:

Before the interview:	During and after the interview:
- Objectives of the farmer profiling	- Visiting the farmer(s) and conducting the interview(s)
- Sampling	- Telling the story / the write-up
- Collecting basic information	- Pictures
- Selection of topics and questions	- Evaluation

The **worksheets** of this tool follow these steps and allow to prepare well for farmer profiling. Please be aware that there are different approaches and suggestions on steps to be taken for interviewing and storytelling, so please do not hold yourself from checking latest insights on these subjects. Some suggestions for further reading are shared in the text of this note.

Objectives of the farmer profiling

It is important to reflect why and for whom you are profiling farmers.

- What is the purpose of the profiling? Why do you want to make farmer profiles or farmer life histories?
- What do you want to learn from it?
- What do you want to communicate, to whom and why?
- Do you want to make several profiles and prepare a farmers' facebook?

For example, a profiling objective could be: 'With farmer profiles, I want to share first hand information from farmers with regard to the challenges they face in improving their agricultural techniques'. This objective orients the focus of the interview. For this objective, topics to address could be agricultural practices, production and productivity, access to inputs, membership of farmers' organisations and relations with other actors. Relevant questions could be: How did the farmer learn the agricultural practices he/she is applying?; What are the issues/ constraints she/he is facing in production; Is the household a member of a farmers' organisation? Does the FO provide support? What are the services of research and extension? And so on.

Sampling

Sampling is important when a more or less representative farmers' facebook is the objective that is pursued. The sample size and sampling method should be clear before you go to the field so that you can share this information with the farmer communities, farmers' organisations and your interviewees (explaining why they are requested to participate).

Basic steps for sampling are the following:

- Reflect on the diversity of farmers and decide on the farmer categories to be represented.
- Think of how to deal with gender and age. Gender sensitivity can be included in the sample, for instance by having a certain percentage of female and male farmers or to have both female and male farmers for the different socio-economic categories.
- In case of many 'farmer stories', you can decide to take a random sample of all farmers (or all members of a farmers' organisation that seeks to make a farmers' facebook), or to take a sample from sub-groups (e.g. small, intermediate and large farmers).

Example: Facebook of maize farmers in a country

A national farmers' federation wanted to produce a representative gallery of profiles of maize farmers in the country. They decided to have 6 farmers from the 6 administrative regions of the country (e.g. a total of 36 farmers). To ensure a certain level of representativeness and to show the diversity of maize farmers, they decided to have the following 6 profiles per region:

1. Female farmer, member of a maize association or cooperative
2. Male farmer, member of a maize association or cooperative
3. A producer (male or female) who is really innovative
4. A producer (male or female) that is not innovative (with focus on reasons why)
5. Female farmer, not member of a maize association or cooperative
6. Male farmer, not member of a maize association or cooperative

For practical reasons, the respondents (1-4) were chosen among farmers participating in a self-assessment. For practical reasons as well, the farmers that are not member of a maize association or cooperative were identified in nearby villages. The sample was furthermore organized so as to have one larger and one smaller farm enterprise for profiles 1 and 2 (either female farmer/larger farm and male farmer/smaller farm or the other way around). The same applied for the non-organized farmers (profiles 5 and 6). For the innovative farmer, the consideration was that the innovations should be representative for the region or of remarkable interest. For the 'not innovative' farmer, the consideration was to profile a typical farmer that is not adopting innovations (whereas he or she could have adopted these). This is just an example of sampling. In any case, it is important to be clear about the selection of farmers that are in the facebook.

Collecting basic information

To prepare well for the selection of topics and questions and for visiting the farmers and conducting the interviews, it is important to have at least some basic information about the context of farming. It is important to think beforehand about the subjects for which you need to have basic information. This basic information (for instance some quantitative data) can be included in the farmer profiles. Use reliable and different sources of information. The collection of basic information allows to be on 'speaking terms' with the farmers and to probe further during the interviews.

Selection of topics and questions

As farmers and farming situations are specific, it is not possible to prescribe the contents of an interview, nor the structure of a farmer profile. At the end of this note, we share some ideas about the topics that may be covered and questions that could be asked during the interview, both for farmer profiling and farmer life histories

Interviews should be based on open questions – without having a printed out questionnaire. The reason is simple: the interview is not an interrogation but a conversation. To have a nice conversation, it is important that the interviewer has subjects and questions in mind, and does not read these from a pre-defined questionnaire. The interview should NOT be like an interrogation. It is therefore important to prepare well. At the end of this note, you can find suggestions for potential topics to discuss and open questions that can be asked, both for farmer profiles and farmer life histories. This is input for preparing semi-structured interviews.

Depending on the objective of the profiling, it is recommended to have 2 to 6 main topics that you aim to explore further with the farmer(s). It is very helpful to have 2-3 key questions for each of these topics. You can start the interview with these subjects and questions. A good preparation of some topics and questions helps to focus better during the interview. Some basic open-ended questions are thus a starting point.

Often, one question leads to the answer of many points you might want to ask. And most of the time, answers to questions give clues or curiosity for next questions. An interview becomes a conversation, if it continues by probing further. Probing should be in line with the profiling objectives and give the opportunity to the interviewed farmer(s) to tell the story she/he would like to share. Again, we cannot

stress it enough: the interview should feel as a nice conversation or dialogue to the interviewed farmers. This is possible if you show interest and if you do not rush through a questionnaire (as is so often done by surveyors in rural areas).

Visiting the farmer(s) and conducting the interview(s)

Visiting the community, fields, stables, orchards and other sites helps to get a good picture of the farmers' realities, considerations and arguments. Staying in the village and sharing the same food with farmers helps to build trust, which is essential for an effective/honest interview, and to correctly represent farmers experiences and opinions.

When it comes to the interview, it is advised to prepare for duration that is convenient for the farmer(s). An individual interview could last for 30 to 60 minutes. A group interview could last for a maximum of two hours. This requires that you have prioritized the subjects you want to explore and the questions you would like to ask.

The selected subjects and questions are the starters for a conversation. It is important that you:

- Start your questions with the 5 W's and one H: When, What, Where, Who, Why and How. This allows for asking open questions (which cannot be answered with a simple yes or no). This is important for getting specific examples and for understanding important considerations of the interviewed farmers.
- Probe and ask further, depending on answers and explanations that farmers share with you.

The interviewer should not take notes during the interview, as this would interrupt the conversation. Often, farmers will be more reluctant to share their views if the interviewer is writing all the time. When the purpose of the profiling is clear to the farmer, it is possible that a second person, who is not the interviewer, takes notes.

More information on conducting a semi-structured interview:

http://www.mspsguide.org/sites/default/files/tool/4msp_tools_semi-structured_interviews_4.pdf

Telling the story / the write-up

After the visits to the farmers' community and fields and the interviews, it is important to do the write-up of the farmer profile or life history as soon as possible. The profile is described in a short document of 1-2 pages (300-500 words and e pictures), which tells about the person (man, woman, youngster) or the persons (family farm members) who has or have been interviewed.

A farmer profile is written in an attractive manner, focusing on qualitative information, while using quantitative information (number of household members, family expenditures, cultivated area, size of holding, marketed volume, etc.) to support the story.

A farmer profile can be written in third person (he, she, name of farmer). It is also possible to present a profile in the first person (I, we), if the article is the story of the farmer him/herself or if it is like a transcription of what farmers have been saying. A combination is possible by integrating quotes. The style depends on the purpose of farmer profiling.

Some recommendations for the write-up of farmer profiles / farmer life histories are:

- Use everyday language that can be understood by everyone. Avoid scientific or difficult words.
- Avoid acronyms and abbreviations, and if this cannot be avoided write the full word (with abbreviation or acronym in brackets).
- Make paragraphs that are not too long and use short and clear headings.
- Include key facts and figures on the farm, farmer household and the community or district where the farmer lives.
- Focus on activities undertaken, results obtained, reflections and considerations, strategies and decisions.
- Integrate some quotes which clearly show the farmer as an actor.
- Incorporate quantitative data to support the subjects and examples that are developed in the text.

More information: FAO's digital storytelling guide:

<http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/webguide/pdf/SM-Storytelling-Guide-en.pdf>

Pictures

Farmer profiles, life histories and farmer facebook are most 'telling' if they have pictures. This is also attractive for readers. It is important to reflect on what type of pictures you would like to have. You are then better prepared. What are the objectives and key subjects of the profiling? What are (likely to be) the main challenges farmers face?

Some recommendations related to pictures are the following:

- Only take and use pictures after approval of the farmer.
- If possible, include the portrait of the farmer of the farmer household.
- Show farmers in action, related to the subjects that are developed in the story.
- Resolution must be at least 150 dpi, 300 is ideal.
- Have at least one picture per page, preferably 2 or 3.
- Caption information: indicate the location and date when the picture was taken.
- Explain what is seen on the photo, with name of farmers that appear in the story and explanation of others in the picture.
- Acknowledge the photographer and his/her organisation.

Evaluation

Conducting semi-structured interviews and preparing farmer profiles and farmer facebook is a skill. To improve your skills, it is important to reflect and learn, with the aim to do better later on.

You can reflect on aspects like:

- Time management – Did you use your time well? Could you get all the information you aimed for in the allocated time? How can you improve your time management?
- Communication – Were your questions clear to your interviewee, did you use the right language? Did you ask the questions you wanted to ask? Did you ask open questions? How did you do when probing? Was the interview like a 'natural' conversation? Did the interviewee remain interested to share his/her story or was he/she bored? What can you improve?
- Atmosphere of the interview – Were you all at ease or you felt tension? Did you notice any changes during the interview? Was this because of the topic(s) discussed? Was it because of the presence of other persons?

Some suggestions of topics and possible questions for farmer profiling

<p>Situation of the family farm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Since when do you live here? ❖ What is your family situation? Are you married and do you have children? ❖ What is composition of your household (adults, men-women, children)? ❖ What are the most important agricultural activities of the farm? ❖ And particularly for yourself (as member of farmer household)? ❖ How did you obtain your farm land? ❖ Do you have other economic activities, i.e. non-farm activities? If so, which ones? ❖ What are the most important expenditures of your family? And of yourself? ❖ What are the ambitions/dreams that you and your family want to realize? ❖ What objectives do you want to achieve in the next 2-3 years? 	<p>Agricultural practices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ What are the changes in the use of your farm land? Have you increased or decreased your cultivated area? Why? How come? ❖ What are the crops you grow? And the animals you keep? ❖ What are the reasons for cultivating the different crops and the animals you keep? ❖ Are you specialized on certain crops or animals? ❖ Do you specialize on certain agricultural activities? Which ones? Why? ❖ Do you organize / run your farm and farm activities today in a different way than before (for instance 5 years ago)? ❖ What are the changes? What are the innovations? What has caused these changes or what are your reasons to change? ❖ Which inputs do you use (seeds, farmyard manure, fertilizer, chemicals, tools, machinery, ...)? ❖ Did any changes occur in the access and use of seed and inputs? ❖ Do you have specific observations to make about the seeds you use (varieties, quality, price, availability)? ❖ Do you have comments on the management of soil fertility (availability of organic and chemical fertilizer, prices, best practices, ...)? ❖ How do you finance your agricultural activities (own capital and savings, sales, informal credit, formal credit)? ❖ Do you have a bank account? Savings? Credit? Which bank/MFI?
<p>Production and productivity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ What is your production (different crops / animals)? How is your production evolving (higher, lower, same)? ❖ Do you know production per land unit (for instance yield per hectare)? How do you measure this? What is the unit of measurement (are, hectare, litres, others)? ❖ How are yields (productivity per land unit / per animal) evolving? ❖ What can you say about the food and nutrition situation of your family? What are your sources of food? Are there changes over the years? What are the most difficult periods? ❖ How do you assess the quality and diversity of nutrition of you and your children? 	

Some suggestions of topics and possible questions for farmer profiling (continued)

<p><i>Storage, conservation and processing</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Do you store your agricultural production? Which crops / products? How? For which period? With what objective? ❖ What are the challenges related to storage and conservation? How do you address these? ❖ Do you process some of your products? Which ones? How? Why? ❖ What are the revenues you get from processing? ❖ What are the challenges related to processing? How do you address these? 	<p><i>Marketing and sales</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Who are your contact persons for selling your production? ❖ When and how do you sell your produce (for most important sales)? ❖ What prices do you get (different markets, different periods of the year)? ❖ Have the prices changed in past years? Do the prices rise or decrease? Why? ❖ Do you observe seasonal price differences? ❖ All in all, what are your benefits? ❖ Can you explain (costs and benefits)? ❖ Do you see possibilities to sell your products better? ❖ Do you perceive new markets? Or new commercial partners? Other modalities to sell?
<p><i>Membership farmer organisations</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Are you a member of a farmer organisation? (consider formal and informal organisations) ❖ Why? Why not? ❖ Which services did you receive / are you receiving from the farmer organisation? ❖ What has been the result and impact of those services? ❖ Do all members of the farmer organisation benefit from their membership? Or are some benefitting more than others? How come? ❖ According to you, what should be the priorities of the farmer organisation in the coming years? ❖ If applicable: how do you see the relation of your farmer organisation with higher tiers (Union, federation, platform, ...)? 	<p><i>Relations with other actors</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ With whom do you maintain business relations (traders, processors, banks and MFI's, agro-input dealers, seed companies, ...)? ❖ How were these relations established? ❖ How do you assess these relations? ❖ What are your relations with research, extension, local authorities, development projects? ❖ How do you qualify these relations? <p><i>External factors</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Which external factors (climate, market prices, government policies and regulations, ...) are influencing (positively or negatively) your farm and the results you obtain? ❖ Can you explain? ❖ ... Other factors?

Some suggestions for Farmer life history

For the farmer life history, which is specific type of farmer profile, it is useful that you imagine that you tell to your brother, sister or friend the following story:

- I met this person in this village and this is what he told me about his/her life and his/her farm:
- I found it very interesting to learn about the changes and events happening in the life of this person, the most significant changes were the following:

Some suggestions for subjects to discuss:

- Since when are you living here?
- When did you become a farmer?
- How did/do you obtain land?
- What other work did/do you do?
- When were you married?
- When were your children born? Are they going to school?
- Why did you become member of the producers' organisation? Why?
- What services did/do you receive from the PO?
- What other service providers come to your farm /house?
- What are your plans for the coming years, for your family, for your farm?
-

A farm-life history has specific interest in the history of farm work and land use and important changes that occurred. Some suggestions for guiding questions:

- What are changes in land use of your farm?
 - Assess for instance the process and degree of specialization on certain commodities (for market-orientation purposes), or, vice versa, assess the importance of maintaining a diversity of crops and the reasons for this.
- Which technological changes did you adopt over the years?
- What inputs (seeds, fertilizer, farmyard manure, chemicals, machines, tools) do you use? Did you use these before?
- What choices did you make to expand or reduce your farm size?
- Who is working on your farm (family labour, hired labour, or labour exchange in community)? Did changes occur?
- Who are your contacts for selling produce? For which markets? Is there any change in the way you store, process, sell your products?
- ...