



# FAIRshare

DIGITAL TOOLS FOR FARM ADVISORS



**Deliverable 8.2:  
Management Committee Reports**

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Project funded under the Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme.

## Technical References

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| Project Acronym     | FAIRshare  |
| Project Title       | Farm Advisory digital Innovation tools Realised and Shared   |
| Project No.         | H2020 818488   |
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|----------------------------|--|
| Deliverable No.            | D8.2   |
| Deliverable Name           | Management Committee Reports                               |
| Dissemination level        | Public   |
| Work Package               | WP 8   |
| Task                       | Task 8.2: Organize FAIRshare project meetings and reports. |
| Lead beneficiary           | Teagasc  |
| Contributing beneficiaries |  |
| Deliverable type           | Report   |
| Due date of deliverable    | 31.10.2023   |
| Actual submission date     |  |

| v   | Date | Beneficiary | Author |
|-----|------|-------------|--------|
| 1.0 |      | TEAGASC     |        |

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### 1. Introduction

The main objective of WP8 was the co-ordination and management of FAIRshare project. Task 8.2, in particular, had as main objective to organise FAIRshare project meetings and reports during the whole project. In the Grant Agreement it was predicted to have a bi-monthly management committee meetings by conference call/Skype. Additionally, to have every six months face-to-face meetings of the project management committee with the Advisory Board as needed. Advisory Board to attend one meeting per annum. Interim consortium partner meetings would take place annually. A summary of the main project meetings during the course of the five-years of the project are presented here.

### 2. Management Committee Meetings

Management Committee meetings were organised throughout the whole project duration. The committee members comprised of members from the coordination team from Teagasc as well as all WP lead partner organizations. Consisting of the following partners: AUA; Teagasc; AC3A; I4Agri; INAGRO; ZLTO and Consulai. SEASN and LAAS were also members of the committee, as they were Regional Hub leads and coordinated User Case activity in the project. The Teagasc coordination team proactively prepared agendas for these meetings in advance. The agendas were shared with all Work Package (WP) leaders ahead of the meeting and discussions were recorded via Zoom and uploaded at Sharepoint platform for project information sharing and future reference.

The first face-to-face Management Committee took place in Brussels, Belgium, on the 13/06/2019. All WP lead partner organisations were represented along with SEASN and LAAS. The meeting was a one day event. The meeting following a similar format to the online meetings in that each WP leader of active work packages was provided time to present their progress. Time was also allocated to

provide an overview of the financial stipulations that partners must adhere to was presented by Jim Codd (CIRCA).

However, soon after the project kick off meeting, on the 29th and 30th of November 2018, Covid-19 pandemic took place and some rearrangements had to be done to mitigate the consequences of the successive lockdowns across Europe. Hence, for a considerable part of the project duration all regular management meetings were conducted only online as this was safe, efficient and effective for participants.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, which necessitated lockdowns and restricted travel, meetings shifted to a monthly online format. Such allowed WP leaders to consistently update each other and the coordination team on the projects' tasks and progress. It also served as a platform for collaboration. By conducting meetings frequently WP leaders were able to develop cohesive plans for their respective WPs with the input from other actors. The meetings usually follow the same format in that all WP leaders were provided time to present to the committee updates on their WP. Occasionally more time was allocated to a WP where a deliverable is imminent. In other circumstances partners who were not WP leads, but are task leads, were invited to provide an overview of their associated issues and deliverables. This facilitated a collaborative approach to project management, where all Work Package (WP) leaders played an integral role in making vital decisions within the consortium.

Face-to-face Management Committee meetings were not possible in 2020 or 2021.



**Figure 1.** Management Committee Meeting, April 2021

Additionally, WP8, led by Teagasc, the project coordinator partner, also interacted and met on a regular basis with each individual WP (usually via Zoom) to oversee the ongoing tasks and deliverables within each WP and ensure that these were reviewed and met the required quality before being finalised and submitted for review.



**Figure 2.** Face-to-face Management Committee Meeting, December 2022.

The Management Committee Meetings dealt with all of the projects tasks and the details of these were reflected in the deliverables and in the periodic reports throughout the project. Some of the more significant challenges and management decisions which took up a lot of time and effort were:

- Covid-19 pandemic;
- Tender for the User Cases;
- Grant Agreement Amendments 1and 2.

### **The Covid 19 Pandemic**

The decisions made, along with the subsequent actions, in response to the Covid-19 pandemic were as follows.

In our discussions with the Commission regarding Covid-19, a significant challenge came to the forefront. The Commission emphasized the need to explore options for postponing certain matters and, more importantly, to illustrate how regional and national initiatives are interconnected at the European level.

The Covid-19 pandemic has underscored the critical role of the agri-food system in society. This moment presented an opportunity to underscore the significance of advisory services within these systems.

FAIRshare has taken action on two distinct fronts. Firstly, by addressing issues related to Covid-19 that actively involve advisors in finding solutions. To facilitate this interaction, a feature was introduced in the DATS Inventory to compile various DATS that enable farm advisors to connect with their clients. Secondly, it demonstrated the effectiveness of virtual communications and collaboration tools and services. These DATS not only fostered connections between advisors and their clients but also facilitated virtual cross-visits and offered training opportunities for both advisors and clients. These efforts were well-aligned with the core objectives of FAIRshare.

#### **FAIRshare's response to Covid-19**

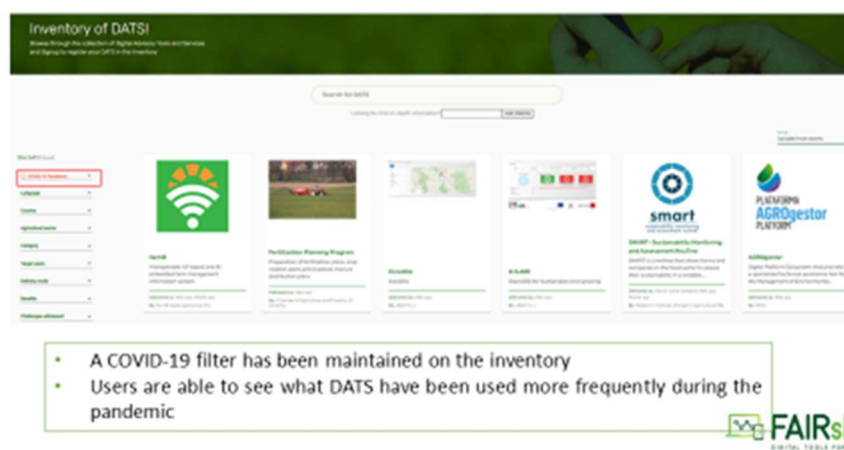
In recent times the management and co-ordination of the FAIRshare project has had to endure the effects of Covid-19. The pandemic has highlighted the benefits of DATS especially as a means to enable advisors to engage with their clients remotely. Therefore, the Management Committee facilitated discussions and plans around the implementation of a Covid-19 filter in the FAIRshare inventory. The filter enables inventory users to search for DATS that have been used more by project partners during Covid-19. The work carried out by AUA in WP1 has subsequently provided an added dynamic to the inventory while also explicitly highlighting further the usefulness of DATS in a post Covid-19 world.

The management team also organised an online webinar with two other H2020 projects to outline how online digital tools can be used for co-design and co-creation (14/04/2020). The webinar was hosted by Dr Áine Macken-Walsh (Teagasc) and provided an overview of the multi-actor process before discussing tools such as PinUp.com, Klaxoon, Kialo, Make my Persona, and Boords. The webinar was attended by 83 participants and was recorded and uploaded to the SharePoint as well as on the projects YouTube account.

The Covid-19 response by the project in the form of the filter and webinar further depicts how online and digital tools are very much here to stay.

**Figure 3.** FAIRshare's response to Covid-19.

## COVID-19: Inventory



**Figure 4.** Feature for DATS useful to be used during Covid-19 at FAIRshare PNF website.

### Tender for the User Cases

Regarding the tender process for User Cases (UCs), it was quite lengthy and encountered some challenges that required resolution in order to achieve a satisfactory outcome. It was widely discussed at the Management Committee Meetings to ensure a unanimous decision and clear approach to the difficulties encountered. It was vital that the specific issues of all partners were resolved without compromising the ambition of the FAIRshare project to support and fund as many diverse advisory services as possible in a fair and transparent way.

There were two type of UCs, internal and external. The project involved both internal UCs, developed by project partners and third parties, and external UCs selected through a procurement process. The 10 external UCs were selected through a public procurement process. Extensions were required for the procurement process, and a substantial effort was made to ensure selection, particularly in North Eastern Europe. Despite all the effort involved in communication and outreach, only one proposal was submitted in North Eastern Europe at the first tender, necessitating a re-tendering process. Detailed communication strategies were developed, and support from external networks was sought to ensure sufficient applicants from the region. At such was achieved with seven User Cases.

As for the more technical issues regarding the tender itself, some unforeseen VAT-related issues and terminology discrepancies between contracts and the Grant



Agreement (GA) arose. These issues required consultation with financial authorities and led to the decision to bring the 10 large external UCs on board as project partners for greater flexibility through an amendment of the GA. As one selected UC was not prepared to take on this administrative burden they withdrew and the funding was assigned to an additional 3 sub-contracted UCs. This provided a budget of €30,000 for 13 smaller UCs.

To address VAT costs, the project decided to subcontract directly with the smaller UCs and cover VAT expenses from the project budget. These challenges highlight the complexity of sourcing willing user cases who were small SMEs and unaccustomed to procurement, taxation, contractual and integration logistical processes within the FAIRshare project.

### Task 8.9: User Case Co-ordination & Funding (M18-60)



- MS7 – 30 UCs selected for initial pilots (April 2021)
- Internal large UCs (20 selected) January/ February 2021 through different processes
- Request for Tender (RFT) launched in March 2021 to select 10 large external UCs



**Only 1 submission in NEE = 7 large UCs (budget of €630,000)**



Decided to relaunch with tailored communication strategy  
– MS extended to June 2021 & met target

## Task 8.9: Main Challenge

March 2021 – October 2021

- Managing procurement process, evaluations, interaction with UCs and failed tenders
- Collection of information regarding tax, insurance etc, appendices for procurement
- Subcontracting – drawing up of contracts



**VAT Risk** – subcontracting implies a service which is vatable – meaning UCs could receive substantially less than the foreseen €90,000 and high risk for LAAS with 7 large UCs (NEE)



**Audit Risk** – If referred to as a grant rather than subcontract, costs could be deemed ineligible under cost category 'subcontracting' – even bigger risk!

**SOLUTION** = Bring them on as Partners

**Figure 5.** Tender process timescale and the need for a re-tender.

### Grant Agreement Amendments 1 and 2

Within the project management committee, a key decision referred to already, was the expansion of the project partners (beneficiaries) through an Amendment of the GA this was completed in November 2021. The project officer and project partners fully supported this expansion as a solution for the funding of work to be carried out by Advisory service user cases outside the original FAIRshare consortium and identified in an open and transparent procurement process. As some of these cases were not familiar with EU project participation this was a slow and difficult process.

The second amendment arose from the sudden death of one of the project beneficiaries who had been actively working on tasks. Being unfamiliar with the steps to be taken in assigning the remaining effort to other partners this also occupied a lot of management committee time. There was a strong commitment from partners to continue the work and complete the task. This amendment was completed on February 2023.

### 3. Annual Meetings

The first Annual Meeting for the project took place in Athens, Greece, on the 21<sup>st</sup> and the 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2019 and counted with 28 delegates, which represented most of the partners of the consortium. All members of the Advisory Board were invited but unfortunately, none was able to attend. The two day event was utilized

to update all partners of the projects progress as well as provide multi-actor training and a workshop on Responsible Research and Innovation (Aine Regan; Teagasc) as well as a workshop concerning advisor/farmer motivations for using DATS (Alexandros Koutsouris; AUA).

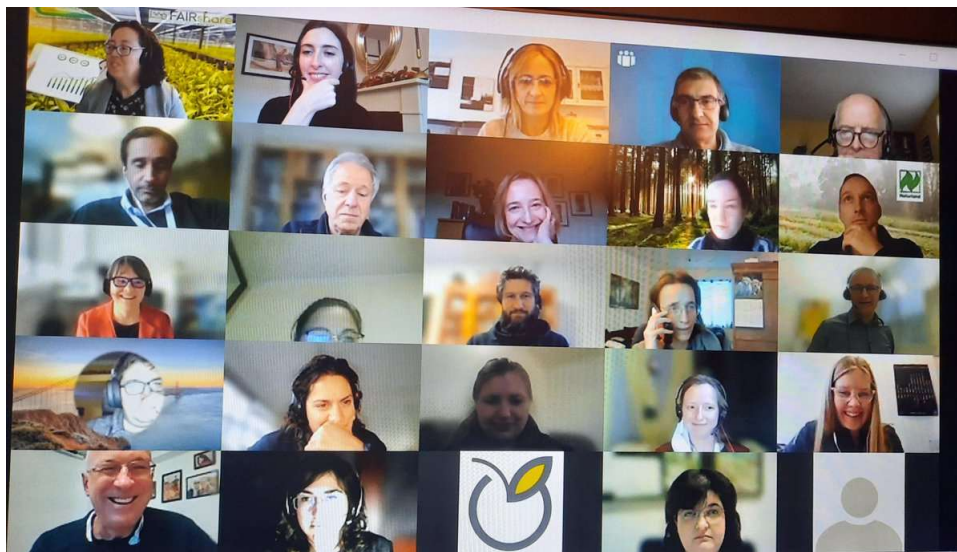


**Figure 6.** First annual meeting in Athens, Greece, November 2019

The 2020 Annual Consortium Meeting took place online. This meeting took place from the 17<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> of November 2020 via Zoom and involved WP updates, interactive workshops and invited speakers including Dr Kristin Davis of the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) as well as presentations about the AGROgestor and AGROasesor digital tools (Spain). Dr Kristin Davis is part of the FAIRshare Advisory Board and is a Senior Research Fellow in the Development Strategy and Governance Division of IFPRI. Much of her work focuses on providing agriculture extension and advisory services that involve digitally-enabled tools or services. Her presentation at the Annual Meeting was entitled “*Developing Local Extension Capacity: Learnings on Digital Extension*”. The presentation included detailed discussion around her experiences of developing local extension capacity as well as the use of some digital tools used in various African countries. Many of the enablers and barriers of digital extension encountered in her work have parallels with issues pertaining to the FAIRshare aims and objectives. Additionally, Ana Armesto and Marta Goñi from INTIA presented to the audience the AGROgestor and AGROasesor digital tools and how they have been applied in Spain. The two digital platforms focus on advisory services and information management with respect to environmental schemes. The presentation provided an overview of how to develop and implement DATS successfully.

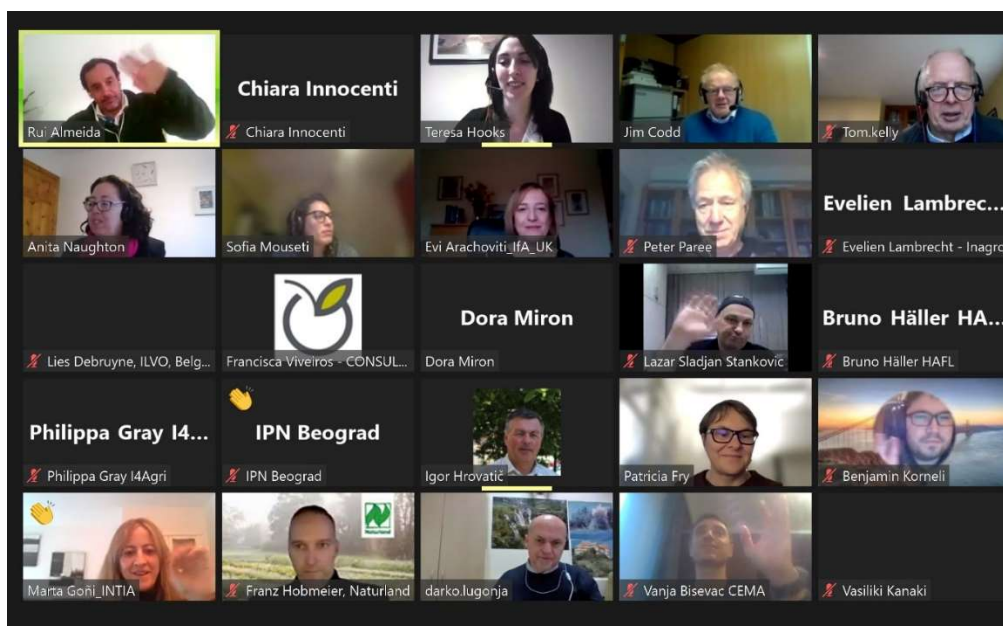
The 2021 Annual Consortium Meeting was initially planned as a face-to-face event, which would overlap with the i2Connect consortium meeting, however an

increase in Covid cases and new variant across Europe resulted in this event moving online over two days to maintain engagement and avoid 'zoom fatigue'. The first day of the meeting on the 30<sup>th</sup> of November 2021 was hosted on Zoom and involved WP updates on work completed during the year and an interactive session on 'what we have learned so far in FAIRshare'. The second day, 7<sup>th</sup> December, was a series of interactive workshops where WP and task leads engaged partners in interactive workshops.



**Figure 7.** FAIRshare partners on zoom meeting 30<sup>th</sup> November 2021

During January and February 2022 FAIRshare project co-ordinators collaborated with colleagues in the i2Connect project and co-hosted a joint online event on the 24<sup>th</sup> of February using Zoom, due to Covid restrictions in place during this time. The event focused on identifying common challenges, knowledge exchange and identifying synergies between the two projects.



**Figure 8.** FAIRshare and i2Connect partners attending interactive workshop 7<sup>th</sup> December 2021

The 2022 Annual Consortium Meeting was organized by ZLTO and took place in Den Bosh, the Netherlands on the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> December and counted with 65 delegates, representing most of the partners of the consortium. All members of the Advisory Board were invited and Krijn Poppe attended. Krijn J. Poppe is a senior economist and chief policy advisor. Before his retirement at Wageningen University and Research, he managed a department of Wageningen Economic Research and various research programs for the European Union covering the food industry, Information technology, amongst others.

The two-day event was the first held in the project face-to-face after Covid-19 pandemic. It allowed for a more personal interaction between partners, to evaluate and discuss the project progress, in particular the User Cases. A poster session and an interactive session were taken enabling further dissemination of the main results and constraints encountered by the several User Cases. Field visits took place as well as two workshops, one on participatory systems mapping, (Anita Naughton, Teagasc) and another one on policy (Vanja Bisevac, CEMA).





**Figure 9.** 2022 Annual meeting in Den Bosh, The Netherlands, December 2022