

# Bonding Bridging and Linking

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## Building a healthier future for Europe's foods and landscapes

When Martin, a sheep cheese producer in the Northern Czech Republic, was selected for the BOND project, he was stuck—exhausted and disillusioned. He and his wife, Jana, were struggling to make a living for themselves and their five children from the family farm.

Farmers and land managers play a fundamental role in the environmental and economic stability of the European farming sector. They are vital in setting a solid basis to sustain food security, the natural resources base and sustainable growth path. The BOND project contributes to a healthier, more productive and harmonious farming sector in Europe for the long term by helping groups and individuals reach higher levels of organisation and networking. It is part of BOND's mission to identify, demonstrate and transfer effective collective solutions to the major challenges affecting Europe's agriculture across the agri-food chain from soil to society.

The BOND consortium is made up of 17 partners from 12 European countries, including both academia and practice

partners. Over three years, these partners organised 53 conferences and workshops attended by 816 stakeholders. Dissemination outreach is almost 400,000, and BOND's website has engagement from 123 countries. The project has seen significant positive shifts in regional and national agricultural policy as well as in the lives of individuals and their families.

### To see, to learn, to tell

BOND's strategy is 'to see, to learn, to tell.' In order to **see**, farmer representatives went on a five-day study tour in a host country to witness best practice examples of collective action. BOND's consortium selected the 60 representatives across 34 European countries

Martin's study tour was in the United Kingdom where he was inspired by the farmers' union, Landworkers' Alliance. Others went to Italy, Norway, France and the Netherlands. Vojin Kopuz, a biological heirloom seed saver from Bosnia and Herzegovina, was one of ten who visited Spain. He was inspired by examples of

schools, kindergartens and restaurants successfully supplied by local and biological food producers. "That's the beauty of BOND", he says, "to go, to meet, to see, to experience. It is not 'it can be done', it is something happening already. I witnessed it, tasted it!" He has seen an acceleration in the development and reach of his work; for this, he thanks his team and "BOND, which gave us hope through the living examples."

**"BOND has influenced the way we talk with farmers,"** says Gaz, who works for the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development in Kosovo. "We decided to set up what we saw in France, The Green Basket (a farm shop cooperative). It started in Pristina in December 2018 with 20 farmers. This is a first in our country. BOND makes a bridge with the work we do with other EU projects."

Other representatives have started organic cooperatives and associations, developed new brands of origin after applying to the EU with BOND learnings, shared BOND ideas with their members, or via articles in their magazines and taken up leadership roles in their associations.

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and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations) led the training in collective action (bonding, bridging and linking) spearheading the creation of a common vision and action plans for the many involved. During the project, over 70 action plans were developed.

Laura’s action plan became one of the key themes in Portugal’s national workshop and an internal activity to test methodology in CNA (Portugal’s National Confederation for Agriculture, and BOND partner). She developed and trained three colleagues, changing the way CNA works and reinforcing its democratic spirit.

### Gamification

One tool introduced in the project was gaming techniques. Researchers at Coventry University developed three playful methodologies for BOND to aid members of the agricultural sector to create playful working practices. Research has shown adding elements of play to work-based tasks helps develop skills in creative problem-solving, innovative thinking, communication and negotiation. Within BOND, it opened up

a new dimension for interaction: a different and unusual interface with policymakers and other players in the food and farming sector that creates the fruitful environment to resolve specific agricultural challenges.

BOND LEGO® Play inspired by LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY®, was particularly popular. Biljana introduced it to a group of rural women farmers in Macedonia. “They can be very closed typically,” she explains, “but the LEGO® game helped them open their minds and talk more about their challenges and come up with initiatives to work together as a network of rural women farmers.” This group have now organised a market to jointly sell their products.

### Impacting nations

After the commitment and connection of farmers, academics, policymakers, CSOs, businesses, environmentalists and consumers at the interregional forum, stakeholders had time to reflect and analyse their attitudes, constraints and weaknesses in order to develop a clearer perspective of solutions and challenges in the future. Bringing this heightened awareness and

their newly acquired skills, they were well placed to meet in fourteen national thematic workshops.

KLT (Hungarian partner) brought together stakeholders to inspire and advance social economy, which has now taken its own momentum.

Spanish partners Sindicato Labrego (SL), COAGCV and UOC, held a national workshop in July 2019, bringing together agricultural organisations, NGOs, private sector and professional networks to work on the flexibility of existing regulations in Spain to benefit family, artisans and agroecological productions. As a direct result, they were able to negotiate with the Spanish government the opening of the farmer markets at a national level, two weeks earlier than officially planned during the COVID-19 lock-down. This had a tremendous benefit for the farmers

in Spain. They have made a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with government entities and are now influencing a significant shift in the flexibility of the sanitary rules.

### Impacting policy

The Advocacy National Workshop in England crystallised in amendments to the UK Agricultural Bill, which was under debate concerning changes to the subsidy system from the EU to post-Brexit. Although the amendment was not approved, it received a significantly more votes because of the lobbying and public interest generated by LWA (UK BOND partner).

Going through the process of **seeing** and **learning**, representatives were increasingly informed in their debates on policy, making

a list of recommendations to policymakers at every stage. End-users grew through these different processes and reaffirmed their position, demonstrating their contribution to society and the benefits of collective action, through dissemination material produced.

Four regional policy roundtables took place in Portugal, Hungary, Romania and Poland. Based on the participatory methods and using the gaming techniques, the roundtables facilitated 20 to 50 participants: farmers and stakeholders at local, regional, national and EU level to reach a mutual understanding of different realities (and sometimes conflicting worldviews, logics and interests) and resulted in coordinated action. Each roundtable resulted in a list of recommendations which were made widely available in the selected countries and to EU policymakers. As participants better understood each other, they concreted the process with a signed MOU.

Thirteen MOUs have now been agreed around subjects of sustainability to knowledge exchange to peasants’ rights to seeds. In France, the message from the MOU was conveyed by CUMA (French partner) to members of parliament and to the EC which led to a ‘communiqué’, developed and shared by BOND’s French, Portuguese, Romanian and Polish partners. Increasing the negotiating power of farmers, not only by creating coalitions at the national level but at transnational level, conveys more force to the messages sent to higher instances such as EC. French parliamentarians have shown a great interest in ‘revamping’ the idea of collectives, a model that has proven itself and is more relevant than ever with the COVID-19 pandemic.

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### Sharing Best Practice and Trainings

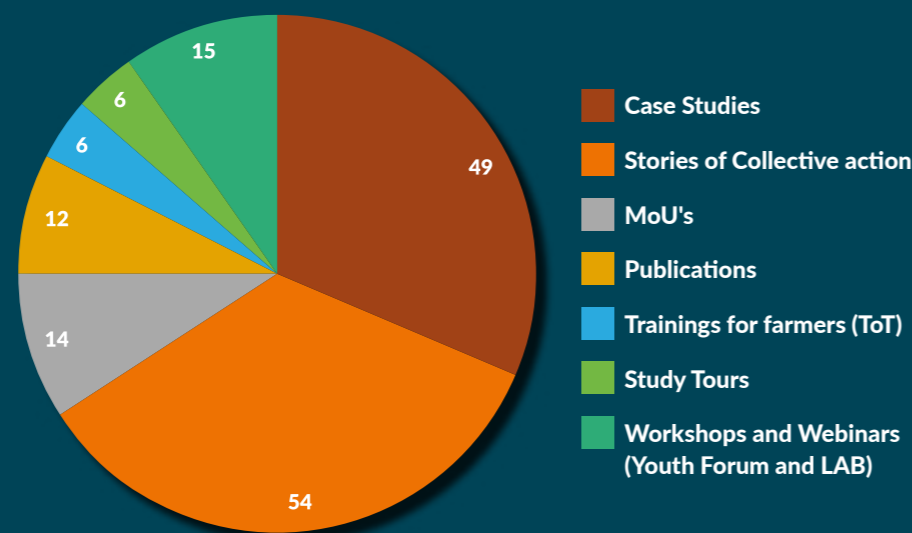


Figure 1: Proportion and numbers of BOND sharing best practice and training output by type.

### Building momentum

BOND articulates its activities step by step to build incremental momentum. Following the study tours, a major interregional forum in Cordoba enabled beneficiaries, partners and other key actors to meet and work together towards the creation of action plans to put the learnings into practice. Although the Netherlands would be considered to have higher levels of organisation, Alex, a permaculture market gardener, didn’t feel represented by existing farmer institutions. She saw the new but unconnected organisations and “with the experience of BOND” she decided to “fill this gap and ... create a new federation of farmers from scratch.” She hosted an informal meeting at her farm in November 2018, and by March 2019 they had established the Dutch Federation of Agroecological Farmers. After the interregional forum, there was a training of trainers (ToT). “Train the trainers was really useful,” says Alex, “because it was about assessment of organisations so it could help a lot when we worked out the structure and organisation of our new federation. BOND gave me the push to try something new. The ToT in Coventry gave me the confidence to do it.”

A total of 704 people have been trained in BOND methods and playful gaming techniques. When Martin returned to the Czech Republic, he set up a meeting for horse-powered farmers. “The training in Cordoba gave me the confidence and tools and methodology to stand up in front of other, sometimes more experienced, farmers,” he says, “to talk and teach and organise.” The progression from **see** to **learn** to **tell** is organic.

BOND Partner, Universidad de Córdoba (UOC) mobilised specific tools to analyse strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to farmer groups, and FAO (Food



SIE, BOND's Polish partner, used their roundtable to bring the issue of farmers' rights into the political debate.

Portugal's policy roundtable centred around trade with international experts speaking about the EU regulation and impact of these policies on family farmers. Following the roundtable, CNA fed back to European Coordination Via Campesina at European level with their proposals regarding the Farm-to-Fork strategy. In April 2020 they entered discussions with members of the EU Parliament.

At the Hungarian roundtable, BOND partner, Védegyelet, brought together a diversity of actors who wouldn't typically connect. Following the event, the Budapest municipality—the Maire's Office—invited three participants to speak about public procurement to the municipality staff. The issue is now on the agenda and being debated and publicised. The roundtable

also birthed a new collaboration for a detailed project proposal, with Italy and Sweden. Védegyelet continues to use BOND tools and methods to strengthen the Hungarian Agroecology Network working this year towards a Hungarian Declaration on Agroecology.

The Norwegian Organisation of Cooperatives (NAC) presented policy recommendations from its BOND Norwegian Youth Forum to the Minister of Agriculture and Food. The recommendations were also published in a national newspaper and 13 regional ones.

Romanian partner Eco Ruralis mapped their network constellation to help them build a more diplomatic voice. They are now the facilitators of the food sovereignty network 'The Alliance of Small Farmers'. WWF and Greenpeace have joined up with them, as representatives of agroecology. Since BOND, WWF visits the Romanian ministry and promotes the rights of farmers.

### Testing the model and Activating the Youth

A 'lab' was developed in Moldova by partner Proentrance to test the BOND model for 12 real-life farmer groups with the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry of the Republic of Moldova (the main national policy-making agency in the farming sector). This exercise aimed at fostering the development of social capital in Moldova—essentially, improving the functioning of social groups through interpersonal relationships, a shared sense of identity and understanding, shared norms, shared values, trust, cooperation, and reciprocity. This works on three levels: **bonding** within organisations, **bridging** between peer organisations to reach higher levels of aggregation, and **linking** with powerful actors such as governments and decision-makers to give a voice and negotiation position to farmers.

Applying the recommendations and using the methods and tools developed throughout the BOND project within the lab provided a demonstration field for other countries in Europe where the level of organisation is low, as a documented example to showcase what can be achieved. A participatory analysis and review of the regulatory environments provided a range of examples and good practices in Europe that facilitate a more enabling environment for farmers and provide solutions to overcome legal constraints, which often represent the main impediment for collective action.

BOND's Youth Forum for the Future brought together 34 farmers under 34 years old from 34 European countries to draw a road map for the future of farming in Europe and inspire and guide national and EU policymakers to cultivate social capital. Scheduled to take place in Romania, this event had to move to a series of online workshops and webinars due to COVID-19 restrictions. Undeterred by the change of format, these young farmers learned and debated and together developed a declaration which will be put forward to Horizon 2020, and to the European Commission for Agriculture and Rural Development.

### Sharing knowledge, and lessons learned

BOND has had an enormous impact on those involved, but that impact must keep growing. Partners have published four regional reports, a regulatory framework, papers on land management, the Youth Forum, stories of collective action, and a synthesis report. The repository of collective action examples (called The Barn) has been adding stories throughout the project, and now holds 55 initiatives from 21 countries.

A video was produced demonstrating BOND's impact on all 17 partners, with increased dissemination of BOND tools and methods led by LEGACOOP (Italy). AMPI, the Czech partner, was a small organisation focused solely on consumer and environmental issues. With support from Spanish and Italian partners, AMPI learned to cooperate with groups it hadn't cooperated with before, realising the relevance of agroecology for the environment. It formed a coalition to help family farms and is now leading the Czech CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) Network. It has recognised small-scale farmers don't have time for political struggle, so AMPI has stepped into that role on their behalf, becoming the voice of Martin and others like him on a policy level. This is an essential aspect. Burn out is a

reoccurring theme among those farmers who work hard not only to produce quality food, agroecologically, but oppose unfair systems or try to bring about innovation and change. Working in isolation is exhausting. Driving collective action typically happens at a voluntary level and concurrently with managing a farm and a family. There needs to be support and routes forward.

Providing opportunities to see, learn and tell, BOND opens up those routes. Collective action, BOND-style, is all about motion—you begin with something static and difficult to move. Starting is where the most significant momentum is needed—to overcome fear, resentment, disappointment, apathy, lack of vision, lack of resources. But once the potential of individuals working together is unleashed, the gears begin to grind, and the whole system begins to move. Collective action is, by nature, a dynamic, rolling thing. As the BOND project facilitates and unites individuals—providing them with an environment to test, try, debate, agree and even agree to disagree—the momentum grows. Connections spark. Healthy, resilient communities are formed. Those who know the land can inform decisions that affect the land. This movement is happening now, and with continued fuel (follow-up projects, wider understanding and investment) collective action will yield healthier, more harmonious food and farming for everybody.



Figure 2: Youth Forum map.



### PROJECT SUMMARY

The aim of the BOND project is to reach higher levels of organisation and networking and develop a healthier, more productive and harmonious farming sector in Europe for the long term. It helps unleash, strengthen, and organise the great potential for collective action and networking of individuals, groups and entities of farmers and land managers in selected countries across Europe.

### PROJECT LEAD PROFILE

Dr Angela Hilmi is an Associate Professor at Coventry University. A biologist, agronomist and socio-economist, with studies in anthropology and sociology of politics, Dr Hilmi has worked with farming communities, governments and the private sector worldwide. She was Senior Officer in FAO-UN, Expert in Partnerships and Alliances for Latin America and Caribbean, and French Foreign Trade Advisor named by French ministerial decree.

### PROJECT PARTNERS

The BOND project is led by Coventry University in the UK in close collaboration with the consortium members consisting of 17 partners from 12 countries in Europe, including universities, large federations of cooperatives, farmer and land manager networks, NGOs and CSOs, organisations in the consumer, legislative and environmental fields, and an international UN development organisation.

### CONTACT DETAILS

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