

THE SUSTAINABILITY OF THE RICE CROP IN EBRO DELTA AREA

Maria del Mar Català-Forner, IRTA (Field crops, Research & Technology Food & Agriculture), Ampostà, Spain.

Abstract:

As a major end user of rice, the Kellogg's company has sponsored this project since 2013 with the aim at developing a sustainable program adapted to rice crop in Ebro delta.

The starting point was a fact-based, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis, based on interviews and data collection. The most notable items were i) low and variable yields and high costs, resulting in low profit, ii) absence of any independent assessment and iii) a high demand of farmers training. The second step was to develop a specific training program, in which the key best rice practices (BRP) were identified and justified addressed to a dynamic volunteer group of farmers led by the millers. The third step was to demonstrate with convincing evidence, in real field conditions, the advantages of the BRP, in selected showcase fields and supported by IRTA. An economic balance showed farmers the significant benefit of growing rice according to the BRP, and they invited new farmers to join, creating a cascade of communities of farmers transferring knowledge and supporting change.

Currently, nearly 30 % of the delta area is grown by farmers who have attended to the training program, and they apply many of the BRP in their fields. Simplicity, trust, implication and close relationships, technical leadership and the use of credible evidence have been proven to support and improve the work of traditional rice farmers.