

European Water Stewardship & RISE Foundation

Provision of the Public Good 'WATER' by farms (P₂O)

Summary Report

Provision of the Public Good 'WATER' by farms: a Pilot study for Evaluation Schemes (P₂O)

- Pilot Studies of the European Water Stewardship (EWS) -

The Voice of Water

**European Water Stewardship (EWS)
RISE Foundation**

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Provision of the Public Good 'WATER' by farms (P₂O)

Index

| | |
|--|----|
| 1. Introduction | 3 |
| 2. Pilot studies..... | 4 |
| Pilot farms' characteristics..... | 4 |
| Part I: Pilots feedback regarding the applicability of the European Water Stewardship (EWS) standard and referring documents | 5 |
| Part II: Evaluation of on-site performance of the pilot farms | 8 |
| Part III: Response strategies | 11 |
| 3. Summary and future steps | 12 |
| Expected outcomes of the RISE Foundation project for the pilot operations . | 12 |
| Expected outcomes of the RISE Foundation project for the EWS | 13 |
| Future steps for European Water Stewardship and RISE Foundation | 14 |

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Provision of the Public Good 'WATER' by farms (P₂O)

1. Introduction

The objective of the P₂O project is to pilot test the applicability and the additional benefit of the European Water Stewardship (EWS) system as tool for farmers to monitor and evaluate their water management performance and hence to prove their performance to provide the public good 'Water'.

To ensure a broad implementation of EWS requirements by European water users, the key tool of the system, the EWS Standard has to be applicable under different site- and sector-specific conditions. Therefore, pilot studies are being established at different locations in Europe and within the different sectors. Furthermore, the pilot tests shall identify the needs of farmers to benefit from the standard as guideline towards sustainable water management practises. The P₂O project is imbedded in this pilot testing program phase.

The implementation of the EWS Standard (version 3.3) has been tested on 2 pilot farms with the aim to:

- Further develop the EWS system with focus on its applicability on-site and its appropriateness of contents.
- Evaluate the on-site performance of the pilot organization, regarding the sustainability of the water management, according to the draft evaluation scheme. This evaluation scheme is still under development. Outcomes of this study can therefore not be considered and communicated as approved certification results.

This project summary report aims to:

- Summarize the pilots' feedback regarding the applicability and the added benefit of EWS on farms.
- Report on the pilots' water management performance, according to the EWS standard requirements.
- Identify opportunities, needs, open points and next steps to be followed up within the Standard development.
- Highlight the similarities and differences between the pilot farms and offer concrete responses strategies.

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Provision of the Public Good 'WATER' by farms (P₂O)

2. Pilot studies

The target group of the P₂O project consisted of:

- Small scale farmers, with irrigated or non-irrigated plant production systems, which was an underrepresented group in the EWS pilot studies.
- Stakeholders on policy level as well as national and regional farmers associations.

Pilot farms' characteristics

Open field vegetable production (irrigated).

- Located in the Leie river basin, a sub-basin of the river Scheldt, of which 0% to 5% of the surface and 5% to 20% of the groundwater bodies are **not** at risk of failing to meet the requirements given by the Water Framework Directive (source: European Commission http://ec.europa.eu/environment/water/water-framework/facts_figures/index_en.htm)
- Water sources for irrigation:
 - Pilot A: Two open ponds collecting rain and drainage water.
 - Pilot B: Groundwater, surface water and collected rainwater.

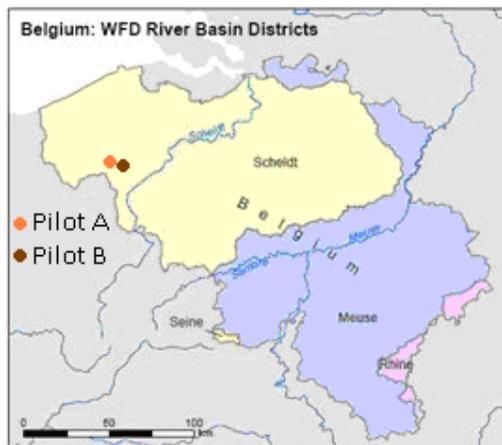


Figure 1 - Pilot Farms' Location in the River Basin

(Source: EC: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/water/participation/map_mc/countries/belgium_en.htm)

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Provision of the Public Good 'WATER' by farms (P₂O)

Part I: Pilots feedback regarding the applicability of the European Water Stewardship (EWS) standard and referring documents

- **Documents:**

- European Water Stewardship (EWS) Standard document:
 - o The EWS Standard is complete.
 - o Text needs to be simplified in order to express clearer the intention of the questions and requirements.
- Checklist and criteria:
 - o Checklist Agriculture and referring documents need to be simplified in language but are applicable on-site.
 - o For small farmers, there is a need to develop a group certification scheme since some indicators are not applicable on individual farm level.
- Requirements for compliance:
 - o Requirements for compliance with the indicators need to be clearer → Good training of farmers is needed to ensure compliance.
- Compatibility with other Environmental Management Systems:
 - o EWS is compatible with existing best management practises e.g. given by associations or Global GAP.
 - o The EWS Standard has the potential to be integrated in existent environmental certification schemes (e.g. Global GAP) and serve then as an "add-on" for water.
- Data requirements:
 - o Due to high Flemish governmental reporting requirements on water and nutrient management, many data are already available or provided on public websites. However, farmers often don't know how to access this information.

- **Evaluation system:**

The current scores from 0-5 points per indicator are considered by auditors to be subjective. However, since scoring enables benchmarking of the water performance per principle, the scores will be kept to initiate continuous improvement.

- **Implementation of the EWS system on-site:**

Practical information and training are considered crucial to transfer the content, the requirements and the goal behind European Water Stewardship and the need for sustainable water management. A harmonized training scheme shall be set up in cooperation with farmers associations and other experts.

Cooperation with the farmers' associations is necessary to support the EWS implementation and the proposed response strategies. Furthermore, training of auditors is a key for harmonized evaluation.

- **Contents of EWS Standard: principles, indicators, monitoring points**

EWP has been revising the checklist Agriculture (version 0.2) based on the outcomes of the pilot farms and discussions. The major outcomes of the pilot farms concerning the EWS Standard document are summarized in following table:

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Provision of the Public Good 'WATER' by farms (P₂O)

Table 1: Major Outcomes of the pilot farms

| | New procedure | Editorial | Discussion points | Needs/Further reporting |
|-----------------------|---|---|--|--|
| Principle 1 | . | | | |
| Indicator 1.1.1 | Guidance should be provided to define a maximum water abstraction rate. | | Maximum abstraction volume. | |
| Principle 2 | Analysis are costly and time consuming: For all indicators for which an analysis is to be obtained, information has to be provided in the annex/guideline indicating where the requested data could be obtained from (e.g. water or soil analysis,...). | | | Add info in annex/guideline indicating public websites to obtain requested info. |
| Indicator 2.1.1 | Training or advice to define main pollutants and priority substances is needed. | | | Set up training program for farmers and for auditors. |
| Indicator 2.1.6 | Procedure to identify, implement and monitor Best Management Practices (BMPs) to prevent eutrophication. | Annex 6 is updated by introducing BMP's. | | |
| Indicator 2.2.1 | Sensitive Areas at production site are difficult to define: To simplify the identification of sensitive areas a list of data sets shall be provided (e.g. in Annex list with Carbon Content, groundwater depth, etc.). | | | Add a list to annex. |
| Principle 3 | One "major" indicator needed. | Change indicator 3.1.1 from minor to major. | | Major indicator. |
| Indicator 3.1.4 | More information should be provided on what exactly is meant by other High Conservation Value (HCV) areas (cultural, social). | | | Add more information in Guideline. |
| Principle 4 | | | | |
| Indicator 4.6.4 | External transparency is difficult to fulfil for individual farm. | | Contact farmers associations involved in the pilot testing to explore and define communication for farmers on group scale. | Transparency as group e.g. farmers association or cooperative. |
| Indicator 4.6.5 | Closer definition about what exact emergency situations, accidents is referred to, here a list of potential scenarios could be provided. | | | Provide more information in guideline document. |
| Criterion 4.7 and 4.9 | Too complicated to be defined and documented by individual farmers. | | Documentation on farmers group level. | |

- **Critical points regarding the operational technical devises to perform the pilot test**

The additional effort needed for reporting, documentation, the execution of extra water and soil analysis and sensitive/HCV areas identification is found very high.

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Provision of the Public Good 'WATER' by farms (P₂O)

- **Applicability of the EWS Standard and referring documents**

Table 2 summarizes the feedback received from the pilot operations regarding the applicability of the EWS Standard and referring documents. In general, the pilot farms reported the following:

Table 2: General feedback of the pilot farms

| | Feedback | Need | Follow up |
|---|---|--|--|
| EWS Standard | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In contents complete. - Difficult wording. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Simplify text. - Make the text more user friendly for both the audit team and for the water user. - Revise (Dutch) translation(s). | EWP: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Revision documents (August 2011). - Set up training material (September 2011). |
| Indicator set | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Missing indicator: (reduction of) total water use. It is only indirectly monitored. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Amend EWS Standard by monitoring the absolute water use over time. | EWP: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Amend indicator set on water efficiency (August 2011). |
| Checklists & referring documents | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In some parts difficult to understand. - Applicable on-site however, some indicators are not applicable on individual farm level. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Revise documents for better comprehensibility. - Revise Dutch translation. - Develop farmers' group certification. | EWP: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Revision of documents (August 2011). - Development of group certification scheme together with control body (July 2011). |
| Evaluation of performance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The evaluation system is considered as subjective but useful to initiate continuous improvement. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Training and quality of auditors to ensure harmonized scoring on indicators. - Finalize document "Requirements for Compliance". | EWP: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop training scheme (September 2011). - Revision of evaluation system (August 2011). |
| Compatibility of EWS Standard | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Need to check compatibility with other (private) environmental monitoring systems (e.g. of Global GAP) and governmental requirements in Flanders. | | |

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Provision of the Public Good 'WATER' by farms (P₂O)

Part II: Evaluation of on-site performance of the pilot farms

Table 3 shows the percentage of indicators (major and minors) that have **not been accomplished** referring to the total number of indicators. In addition table 4 gives an overview of the (non) compliance of the major and minor indicators per principle.

Table 3: Percentage of NON-compliance (NCs)/improvement points (IPs) per principle

| | Major ^{*1} | | | | | | Minor ^{*2} | | | | | |
|--------------------|---------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|-----------|---------------------|----------|-----------|-----------|----------|-----------|
| | Pilot A | | | Pilot B | | | Pilot A | | | Pilot B | | |
| | Total N° | N° NCs | % | Total N° | N° NCs | % | Total N° | N° IPs | % | Total N° | N° IPs | % |
| Principle 1 | 6 | 4 | 67 | 6 | 3 | 50 | 3 | 3 | 100 | 3 | 1 | 33 |
| Principle 2 | 7 | 5 | 71 | 8 | 3 | 50 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 100 |
| Principle 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Principle 4 | 9 | 1 | 11 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 9 | 2 | 22 | 10 | 3 | 30 |
| Total | 22 | 10 | 45 | 23 | 6 | 26 | 15 | 5 | 33 | 16 | 5 | 31 |

Total N° = total number of major and minor indicators

N° NCs = number of non-compliance points (majors scored < 3)

N° IPs = number of improvement points (minors scored < 3)

% = number of non-compliance/improvement points in relation to total number of indicators [NCs, IPs/ total N°]

*1: all major requirements have to be accomplished to comply with EWS Standard

*2: at least 95% of minor requirements have to be accomplished to comply with EWS Standard

Table 4: Overview of (non) compliance per indicator per principle

| | Major Indicators: Compliance = ● / Non-Compliance = ● / Non-applicable ○ | |
|---------------------------|--|---------------------------|
| | Minor Indicators: Compliance = ■ / Improvement Points = ■ / Non-applicable □ | |
| Principle/ Pilot | A | B |
| P1 Abstraction | ●●●●●●○○ ■■■ | ●●●●●●○○ ■■■ |
| P2 Quality | ●●●●●●○○○ ■ | ●●●●●●○○○ ■ |
| P3 HCV | ■■■□ | ■■■□ |
| P4 Governance | ●●●●●●●○○ ■■■■■■■■■■□□ | ●●●●●●●○○ ■■■■■■■■■■□□ |

Table 3 and 4 reveal that none of both farms directly complies with the major requirements of the EWS Standard. Main improvement points, for both pilots, will have to be accomplished for Principles 1 and 2.

Based on the outcomes of the pilot studies, pilot farms received a list of strengths and major improvement points to reach full compliance with the EWS standard requirements.

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Provision of the Public Good 'WATER' by farms (P₂O)

Table 5: Summary of major strengths and improvement points for the pilot farms

| Principle 1 | Achieve and maintain sustainable water abstraction in terms of water quantity |
|--------------------|---|
| Major strengths | - Use of alternative sources for irrigation (e.g. captured rainwater). |
| Improvement points | - To monitor the abstracted water volume of surface water sources* and harvested rainwater, on regular basis (min. monthly). - To evaluate the water sources sensitivity. |
| Principle 2 | Ensure the achievement and maintenance of good water status in terms of chemical quality and biological elements |
| Major strengths | - Establishment of buffer strips. |
| Improvement points | - To fully report and classify all used priority substances, main pollutants and specific pollutants. - To identify vulnerable areas at the farm. - To estimate the impact on potential destinations and define actions to prevent impacts. |
| Principle 3 | Restore and preserve water-cycle related high conservation value criteria |
| Major strengths | - Maps indicating high conservation values in farms' proximity are available as legal requirement at regional level. |
| Improvement points | - To map protected and high conservation value areas in 25km wide range from farm. - To describe the impact on protected and high conservation value areas. |
| Principle 4 | Achieve equitable and transparent water governance |
| Major strengths | - Closed washing system for vegetables. - Investment in more efficient irrigation techniques. |
| Improvement points | - To identify clear procedures to handle accidents. - To communicate externally on sustainable water management. |

* In this river basin there is no legal obligation to meter the abstraction of surface water.

In table 6, the summarized score of each pilot farm (which includes only major and minor indicators) is shown. This scoring can be used for internal benchmarking of the performance of the pilot organizations. The maximum achievable score is different for each pilot, due to different applicability of some indicators.

The indicators classified as recommendations (table 7) are not included in the final scoring. Scores achieved by these recommendations are considered as "excellence points".

Table 6: Summary of achieved scores at pilot farms

| Summary of scores | Pilot A | | | Pilot B | | |
|--------------------|----------------|-----------|-------------|----------------|-----------|-------------|
| | Achieved Score | Max Score | % | Achieved Score | Max Score | % |
| Principle 1 | 17 | 45 | 37,8 | 21 | 45 | 46,7 |
| Principle 2 | 16 | 40 | 40 | 24 | 45 | 53,3 |
| Principle 3 | 6 | 10 | 60 | 6 | 10 | 60 |
| Principle 4 | 55 | 90 | 61,1 | 54 | 95 | 56,8 |
| Total Score | 94 | 185 | 50,8 | 105 | 195 | 53,8 |

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Provision of the Public Good 'WATER' by farms (P₂O)

Table 7: Summary of excellence points achieved by pilot farms

| "Excellence Points" (additional recommendation score) | Pilot A | | Pilot B | |
|--|----------------|-----------|----------------|-----------|
| | Achieved Score | Max Score | Achieved Score | Max Score |
| Principle 1 | n.a | n.a | n.a. | n.a |
| Principle 2 | 7 | 10 | 7 | 10 |
| Principle 3 | n.a | n.a. | n.a. | n.a. |
| Principle 4 | 4 | 15 | 4 | 20 |
| Total Score | 11 | 25 | 11 | 30 |

Based on this evaluation, it is possible to identify strengths and weaknesses in terms of water sustainability of each farm. Figure 3 gives an overview of both pilot farms' achieved scores. A similar pattern can be defined showing best performance in Principle 3 "Restore and preserve water-cycle related high conservation value areas", where both reach scores of 60%, and weakest performance towards Principle 1 on "Achieve and maintain sustainable water abstraction in terms of water quantity" where the average score is 42,2 %.

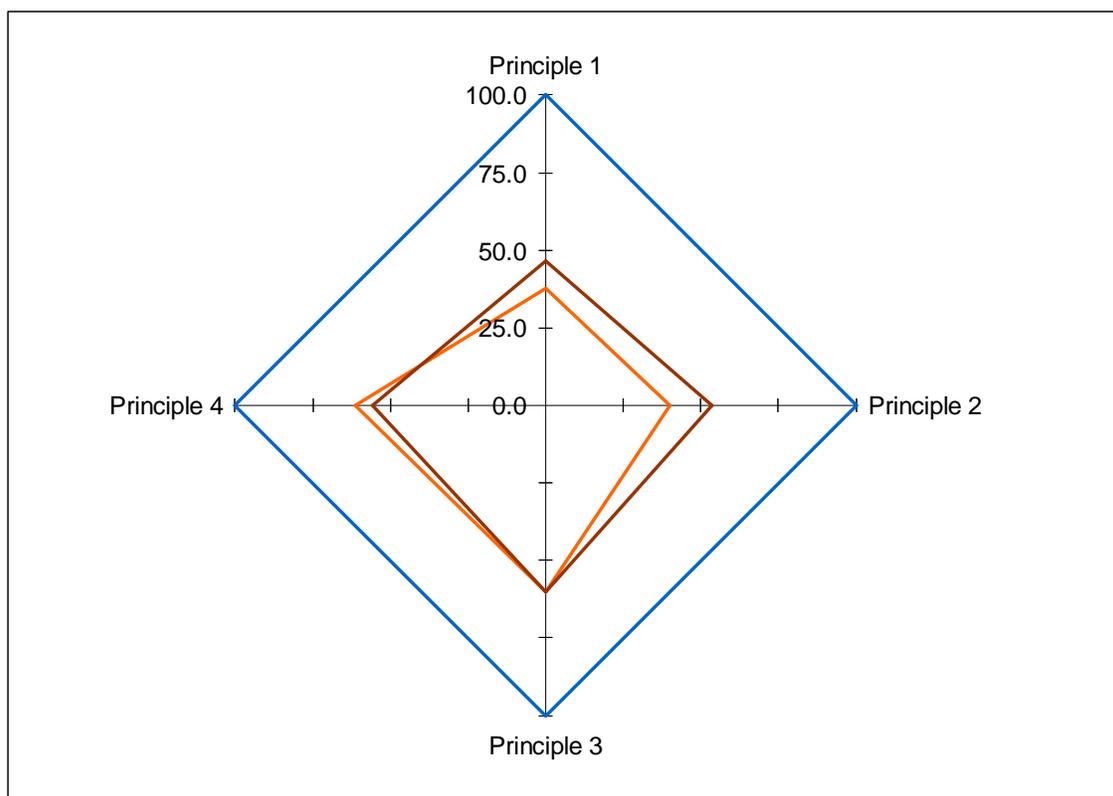


Figure 3: Scoring of pilot farm water management performance by principle

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Provision of the Public Good 'WATER' by farms (P₂O)

Part III: Response strategies

Pilot farms received an exhaustive analysis disclosing major improvement points with regard to their operational water management regarding sustainability. To improve these critical points, tailored response strategies are defined which take specific conditions in the river basin into account.

The response strategies established for the pilot farms cover:

Principle 1: Achieve and maintain sustainable water abstraction in terms of water quantity

- The abstracted water volume and the water used for irrigation over time needs to be monitored and reported to be able to develop sustainable water abstraction/use. More concretely the sides of an open pond, which is supposed to collect (highly nutrient loaded) drainage water from fields, need to be sealed as it is probably connected to groundwater. In this way the potential to groundwater pollution and groundwater abstraction should be prevented.
- Analysis is needed to verify whether the used sources are sensitive or not, such that less sensitive sources can be addressed for water abstraction.
- Farms need to define a maximum abstraction volume per source - if not provided by authorities.

Principle 2: Ensure the achievement and maintenance of good water status in terms of chemical quality and biological elements

- For all potential polluting substances applied, an up-to-date and complete record needs to be established, indicating the number and volume of the applications with the indication of the type of pollution and the potential sources inducing the pollution. Also manure needs to be taken into account.
- The irrigation water needs to be analyzed and monitored in terms of quality to exclude accumulation of substances due to recycling.
- Farmers need to identify sensitive areas at their land, with regard to exposed risks for water pollution. When sensitive areas are identified, optimized culture systems need to be established.

Principle 3: Restore and preserve water-cycle related high conservation value criteria

- High Conservation Value areas need to be involved in all farm decisions based on the given actual and future protection targets.

Principle 4: Achieve equitable and transparent water governance

- Each farm needs an internal water management strategy to support implementation of targeted actions.
It needs to include:
 - a. A procedure for an optimized and integrated management of water and other resources.
 - b. Preventive measures to mitigate impacts of water use.
 - c. Applicable and targeted best management practices.
 - d. An action plan for potential accidents – also at farmers group level and in cooperation with the river basin authorities.
 - e. A procedure that allows monitoring the achieved improvements on long term.
- Active involvement of farmers' groups in river basin activities is needed to represent farmers' benefits and needs for sustainable water management.

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Provision of the Public Good 'WATER' by farms (P₂O)

3. Summary and future steps

The implementation of the EWS Standard version 3.3 has been tested in 2 pilot farms towards its applicability on-site and its appropriateness of contents.

The EWS is considered as a strong support to improve the water management performance of farms, since all relevant aspects of their water management are covered. Even under highly regulated conditions, as in Leie river basin, and on farms with high developed water management, the EWS provides added value by giving a new, comprehensive and far-reaching view on the sustainability of the water management performance at farm and at river basin level.

Expected outcomes of the RISE Foundation project for the pilot operations

1) An analysis of the sustainability of the pilot farms' operational water management and identification of concrete response on how to achieve improvements

According to the current evaluation, none of the two pilot farms directly complied with the requirements of the EWS Standard. To overcome this, tailored response strategies are defined per pilot farm corresponding to the major challenges of their operational water management regarding sustainability. These response strategies can be used as basis to adapt and develop their water management strategy.

The response strategies established for the two pilot farms (refer to Part III: Response strategies) cover mainly principle 1 and 2, which are "Achieve and maintain sustainable water abstraction in terms of water quantity" and "Ensure the achievement and maintenance of good status in terms of chemical quality and biological elements". This is due to:

- a) Missing monitoring of abstracted water volumes abstracted from surface and harvested rainwater water sources;
- b) Insufficient awareness of impacts of farm activities on water quality.

Furthermore, major improvements may be achieved for Principle 4 ("Achieve equitable and transparent water governance"). The main restriction is that pilot farms are small enterprises and are little or not involved in policy processes. These response strategies have to be initiated mainly on farmers' association level and within training for awareness raising of farmers.

For all farms compliance is achievable when using additional guidance and training. And collaboration between farmers and associations will improve or facilitate the accomplishment of referring indicator requirements. Although, additional incentives may be needed to implement the EWS Standard on-site.

2) An outreach from the pilot operations to other water users in their River Basin through the tools imbedded in the EWS System and an incentive to enhance participation in the River Basin management:

Farmers' organizations can disseminate/communicate their experiences and the practices or tools mentioned in the EWS System to achieve good water management. These comprise topics as:

- a) Reduce water use by exploring alternative sources.
- b) Metering surface water to monitor reduction.
- c) Developing and implementing a water management strategy, including Best Management Practices to reduce their impact on water quality and availability.

However, with regard to the outreach for participation in the River Basin management, the farmers' association or farmers group will have to take a more active role itself.

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Provision of the Public Good 'WATER' by farms (P₂O)

Expected outcomes of the RISE Foundation project for the EWS

1) Applicability of the EWS Standard by local farmers under different site- and production-specific conditions:

Content and format of the proposed response strategies does not directly appeal a single farmer. Benefits of the EWS are only obvious on long-term and are therefore difficult to communicate to farmers, e.g. the preservation of water quality downstream, less groundwater abstraction, etc. Moreover, the implementation of response strategies requires additional efforts, e.g. the analysis of irrigation water samples. Also applicability of the standard plays a role. A "ready-to-use tool" for documentation at farm level will enhance implementation.

In summary, the EWS Standard will be more attractive to small farmers when they receive response strategies containing more practical information and measures that are directly applicable on-site. The contribution of an individual farm is very important, but it has to be evaluated on river basin level and within a farmers group.

As a result, the EWS Standard implementation shall also be possible on a farmers group level, in particular when dealing with SMEs. A farmers group can be a suitable entity for certification because within a group training can be optimized, technical advice can be disseminated and some indicators referring to impacts on river basin level can be answered for the entire group. Performance evaluation and reporting at a farmers' group level makes the EWS System more accessible for single (small) farmers. Additionally, the benefit of the implemented response strategies can be optimized when implemented on group level and when in the river basin committees are involved.

Therefore, a pilot test for group certification and a training program will be set up. The farmers association will play an important role here as link between the farmers and the EWS, giving farmers training on all levels. The farmers' association will also contribute in River Basin activities to represent the agricultural sector.

2) Feedback from future standard users on the proposed evaluation scheme and communication tools

Feedback mainly suggested to simplify the indicator texts. Also guidance and help was needed to fill in the questions of the system plan, which again states the need for training.

The current evaluation system is considered as suitable basis to initiate continuous improvement by benchmarking of the water performance. However, the points system needs to be revised. The "strengths and improvement points" table gives a tangible and concrete summary of the findings for each principle. The ranking in Bronze, Silver and Gold categories has been proved to be suitable in order to provide communication tools and incentives to improve.

The benchmarking based on scores and the referring spider-web evaluation provides basic information to define internal water management targets.

3) Better understanding of the impacts of implementation the EWS Standard on farms at an early stage of development:

The EWS Standard implementation will require from farmers additional capacities for training and to set up the internal monitoring system. Major challenges and influencing factors in this sense are:

- a) As long as there are no "external drivers" in place individual and small farms will not be motivated to comply with the EWS Standard and to change behaviour. One potential external driver can be "market access" for different retailers or retailer groups.

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Provision of the Public Good 'WATER' by farms (P₂O)

- b) Another factor for successful implementation will be to reduce the efforts of individual farmers through group certification e.g. under the coordination of farmers' cooperatives as Vegras. In these groups, the implementation efforts can be shared. Cooperatives will then have the benefit to become sector leaders and to communicate their efforts to clients and authorities.
- c) To avoid an additional certification procedure and burden for farmers it will be important to benefit from synergies when different environmental certification systems are audited by the same control body and at the same time. Therefore, the EWS Standard shall be recognized and established as "add-on" standard e.g. by Global GAP.

4) Active involvement and participation of agricultural stakeholders in the development of the EWS Standard:

Farmers' associations and auditors play a key role in the development of the EWS Standard: their expertise and experience will ensure that the future EWS Standard will meet the needs of the farmers. Vegras' potential role can be:

- a) The promotion and dissemination of the European Water Stewardship approach;
- b) To take care of the concrete coordination of the farmers' group.

5) The EWS can be used to prove the provision of the public good "water" by the farming sector:

The evaluation system, which discloses the relative performance of the pilot farm, can be compared to the maximum achievable performance when providing the public good. Since the evaluation is performed by principle, the provision of quantitative, qualitative and socio-economically related aspects of water services can be separately evaluated and followed up.

Future steps for European Water Stewardship and RISE Foundation

Based on these outcomes, the next steps for the EWS program have been defined as to:

- Develop a group certification scheme.
- Revise the EWS Standard and referring documents according to the feedback from the pilots.

And in further collaboration with RISE Foundation the following steps will be taken on:

- Raise the benefits of certification for a farmer by giving direct practical advice.
- Set up a training program and training material for farmer groups and auditors.