Digitising and sharing certification data

FarmDigital

Entrepreneurs active in the agricultural sector spend more and more of their time registering and publishing all kinds of data, as the government, certification bodies, banks, clients, the retail sector and consumers all want to have more insight into how safe and sustainable their food is. The majority of this agriculture-related data is still paper-based, spread over different systems and difficult to exchange between the people who want to access it. This is why digitising agricultural business data is an important item on the agenda. With Farm Digital, we can respond to these developments. Farm Digital is an action research programme which is currently working towards a situation in which data only needs to be entered once and can be shared easily. It aims to achieve this goal by standardising data and developing and implementing an independent, digital platform for people to use.

Striving for food security, sustainability and transparency

Farm Digital is a public-private cooperation within the Dutch top sector policy. The Netherlands' top sectors of Horticulture & Propagation Materials and AgriFood are striving to create sustainable and transparent agricultural supply chains in order to guarantee food security and sustainability. Farm Digital is making its contribution to this cause by developing and marketing an online infrastructure that will enable users to freely exchange information about certification data. Standardisation authorities, certification bodies, business communities and scientific groups all work together within Farm Digital under the direction of LEI Wageningen UR.

The programme develops standards for exchanging certification data, sets up a proof of concept in AgriPlace and maps out the business models that can form the basis of these.

Standardising data for more efficient working practices

The supply chain currently lacks a universal standard for the recording and exchanging of data relating to sustainability and security, making recording this data a time-consuming or often insurmountable task. As a consequence, many data are incompletely recorded, so people who wish to access the data do not gain sufficient insight into sustainability and food security. Farm Digital is aiming to define an accessible international standard that makes recording and exchanging data more efficient. The standardisation authorities AgroConnect and Frug I Com are working together within the Farm Digital programme to develop this universal standard.

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One solution for all certification data

Entrepreneurs in the agricultural sector usually sell more than one product and deliver to different parties. Because of this, entrepreneurs need to meet the requirements of several certification systems. However, there's more to obtain certification for sustainable and secure food than just filling in a questionnaire. Gaining certification means a visit from an auditor, who carries out a thorough inspection of the business. A long list of supporting evidence is needed to demonstrate how much effort a company has invested in sustainability. This process is very time-consuming. AgriPlace, Farm Digital's proof of concept, is an online certification platform for entrepreneurs in the agricultural sector. Here they can digitally compile all the necessary pieces of evidence, smoothly work through the questionnaires for different types of certification and send all the required documentation to the auditor with just one click. This reduces the time it takes to obtain certification and simplifies the work of both entrepreneurs and auditors.
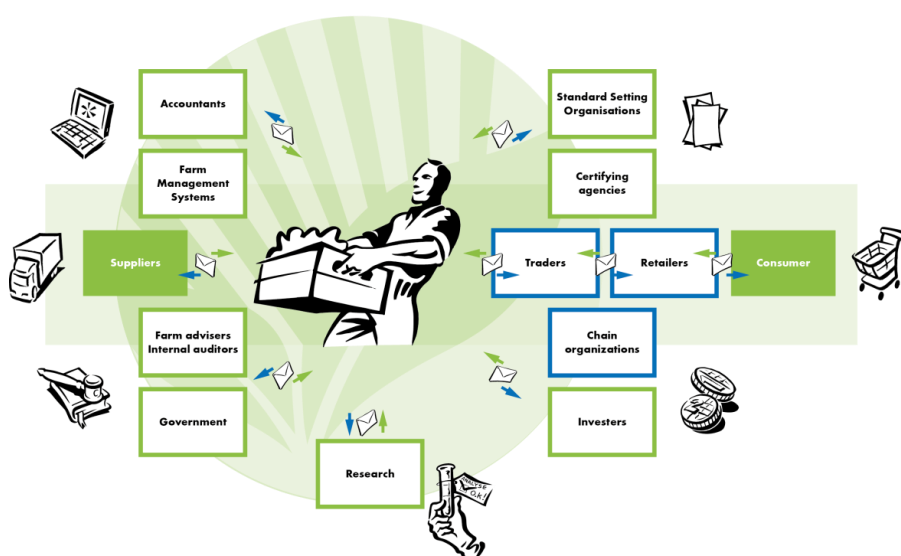
If the platform is independent, who owns it?

When an entrepreneur is a member of a commercial platform, it is often challenging to switch to another, newer platform at a later date without losing any data. To make matters worse, the process of exchanging information between commercial platforms is often complicated, meaning there is hardly any opportunity to reuse data. Farm Digital is developing an independent platform, and as part of this process is also researching which business models the platform could support. Who is responsible for this: the sector, the individual entrepreneur or the certification body? And who actually owns the data on the platform? What are the pros and cons of the different ways in which the platform and data could be managed? By developing a business model, we can answer these questions.

Connecting with the sector

Amongst its other relationships with the sector, Farm Digital is connected to the agricultural industry via a business council, which has representatives from all links in the supply chain. These parties play an active part in the activities carried out within the framework of Farm Digital's experimental research.

The Partner Network

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