

Can incremental changes pave the way to sustainability?

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Abstract

In 1999 co-operative Producers' groups in Imathia, Northern Greece, in order to retain access to export markets for fruit (both fresh and canned) participated in an integrated farming scheme. Their main objective was to reduce pesticide residues. They succeeded in that through the implementation of an environmental quality assurance scheme in primary production, supported by an innovative organizational structure. The main characteristics of the system have been the commitment of management teams, the increased role of consultants and advisors in implementing, monitoring and internal auditing of the system as well as emphasis on farmers' training.

Within the course of UNISECO H2020 project, we conducted research using the Socioecological Systems approach. The results suggest that the social capital accumulated enabled the Producers' groups in conjunction with advisors, to design and promote a collective agrienvironmental scheme for the widespread adoption of an alternative way for plant protection. This has been adopted by the State authorities, and implemented to permanent crops in this and other areas. Thus, although the underlying reason triggering transition has been access to markets and competitiveness, albeit the changes have been merely incremental, the promotion of collective management contributed to the accumulation of social capital that made possible the implementation of a bottom up designed agrienvironmental scheme, the first in Greece, with considerable success in terms of acceptance by farmers and farmers' organizations and hopefully, to the cease of pesticide use in a considerably extended area of intensive agriculture.