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RESEARCH PROJECT

DisCoverCrop

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Diversification with cover crops - Sustainability in potato production



Contact our coordinator



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Summary

The European Union is committed to transforming its agri-food systems to be more environmentally sustainable, climate-friendly, and resilient. A key strategy for achieving these goals is the use of **crop diversification**, specifically **the incorporation of winter cover crops into potato rotations**. However, the benefits of cover crops for potato cultivation are not fully recognized or exploited in some countries, particularly in the major production areas of northwest Europe.

This project aims to address this gap by determining effective cover crop strategies for potato production in northwestern countries (EE, SE, NO, NL and DE) and providing evidence-based communication for their use. To achieve this, **field experiments** will be conducted across different locations and climate conditions in **research farms and through farmer-led field trials (living labs)**. These experiments will evaluate both established cover crops and novel plants suitable as cover crops, assessing their impact on soil functions (including pathogen load), disease incidence, the integration of microbial biocontrol agents, plant performance, soil microbial community diversity, and potato yield.

At the start of the project, **workshops** surveying both researchers and practitioners will be held to identify knowledge gaps, beliefs, and communication needs among the participants. The project will use this information in a co-creation, multi-actor approach, involving all relevant stakeholders in the design, implementation, and evaluation of the experiments to ensure the project's activities are relevant and

feasible. We will also strive to ensure socio-economic factors are considered for end users. In this way we will also maximise the dissemination of the results and create a positive impact on the agricultural community. Our transnational approach brings together stakeholders and researchers from EE, & SE (where a few early adopters use cover crops) and NO (where cover crops are not yet used) with more experienced cover crop users in NL and DE. Our focus stakeholders in SE are starch potato producers, whilst in NO we will work closely with table potato producers. Combining knowledge from these groups and the current users in NL and DE will allow us to broaden perspectives and impacts and will drive innovation within the project.

To showcase the benefits of cover crops and encourage their adoption, **demonstration plots** that will serve as lighthouses, and **field days** will be organized, along with a **discussion and exchange symposium for farmers, advisors and other interested stakeholders**. Based on the project findings, **recommendations** will be developed for the practical use of cover crops in potato rotations, highlighting their adaptability to different potato production systems in northwestern Europe. Our interdisciplinary team combines both **natural sciences and humanities approaches within agricultural sciences**, including soil chemistry, molecular plant-microbe interactions, plant sciences, soil microbiology, agronomy and communication research along with advisory services and practical farming knowledge to achieve these outcomes.

By promoting the use of cover crops, this project will contribute to the EU's goals of sustainable and climate-friendly agriculture. The findings will provide valuable data for both national and EU level agri-food policies, and the increased awareness and adoption of cover crops will benefit the agricultural community, consumers, and the environment.

Top image: Potato soil. Source: [javier albuja](#) on [Unsplash](#)

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