PRESS RELEASE

The APOLLO EU project sets out to bring affordable precision agriculture to smallholder farmers

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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APOLLO is an EU project aiming to develop agricultural advisory services aimed primarily, but not exclusively, at smallholder farmers. The project aims to bring the benefits of precision agriculture to farmers through affordable information services, making extensive use of free and open Earth Observation data, such as those provided by the EU's Copernicus programme. These services will help farmers to make better decisions by monitoring the growth and health of crops, providing advice on when to irrigate and till their fields and estimating the size of their harvest. Ultimately, these interventions should lead to less waste and higher yields - and therefore increased profitability and competitiveness.

The APOLLO project brings together nine partners from five European countries (Greece, Spain, Austria, Belgium and Serbia), and combines expertise in agronomy, agricultural services, soil science, remote sensing and Earth Observation. The consortium is proud to include two farmers' associations – the Agricultural Cooperative of Pella in Greece, and the Association of Farmers of the Municipality of Ruma in Serbia, who will pilot and test early versions of the services. A third pilot will be carried out in Spain.

APOLLO responds to a series of challenges facing the agricultural sector as a whole, and smallholder farmers in particular. Global population growth means that farmers will need to grow twice as much as they do today in order to feed the planet's 9 billion inhabitants[1]. At the same time, there is less land available for agricultural production, thanks to the expanding population, soil erosion and water scarcity. Finally, there are social and regulatory pressures on farmers to reduce their environmental impact: in other words, to use less pesticides, fertiliser, water and fuel.

Precision agriculture can help to address these challenges. Detailed information about the state and health of crops allows farmers to apply chemicals and water in the precise quantities required, where and when they are needed. This approach is extensively used by large-scale farm managers, but is still relatively new to small-scale farmers, who often cannot afford heavy investments in new technologies. APOLLO aims to open up the precision agriculture market by making affordable and easy-to-use agricultural advisory services available to farmers, farmer associations and agricultural consultants.

The APOLLO project was successfully launched at its inaugural meeting, held in Thessaloniki on the 12th and 13th of May 2016. The pace and output of the meeting reflected the complementarity of the partners and the strength of the several working relationships which already exist between many of them. The discussions converged on issues such as the nature and variety of the target users in the different countries, how best to approach the collection of user requirements, and the technical issues to be overcome in developing the services. A special visitor to the kick-off meeting was a Serbian farmer, invited by the Ruma farmers' association, who shared his views on the opportunities and challenges of introducing new technological solutions to smallholder farmers.

[1] http://www.worldwildlife.org/stories/freezing-the-footprint-of-food

Since its launch, the project has been represented at several geospatial and space-related events: the Geospatial World Forum, the European Space Solutions conference, the NEREUS event "What can Sentinels do for regions?" and the Copernicus Agriculture and Forestry Applications User Requirements Workshop.

Preparations are now underway for the collection of user requirements for the APOLLO services through a survey and focus groups. The project team invites interested parties (farmers, agricultural consultants, associations) to get in touch in order to express their views, participate in the survey, and subscribe to the project's mailing list.

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