

The Human Element of Sustainable Farming: Integrating Ergonomics, Risk Management, and Policy compliance.

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Concept and Relevance

The working group would explore how to effectively implement the policies relevant to workplace health and safety by using practical tools from **ergonomics** and **risk assessment**.

The EU Directives and International Regulations serve as legal requirements to observe the workers' rights and labor standards. This creates a direct incentive for farmers to improve working conditions. However, many farmers may not have the knowledge or tools to do this effectively. This is where the working group's focus on risk assessment and ergonomics comes in.

This working group will make the case for ergonomics as a core strategy for building a safer and more efficient agricultural sector. While often overlooked, ergonomic principles can significantly reduce the physical strain and injury risk for farm workers, from musculoskeletal disorders to repetitive stress injuries. The session will discuss various risk assessment methodologies that focus on the degree and severity of ergonomic risks, allowing for more precise and effective interventions. Finally, we will demonstrate how these practical, on-farm improvements directly address the relevant policies (*for example, social conditionality requirements of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)*) turning a policy mandate into a tangible benefit for both workers and farm operations.

Aims:

The primary aim is to show that ergonomics is not just a buzzword but a powerful, practical tool for improving farm operations and compliance. We aim to:

- **Showcase new knowledge** on how a proactive, ergonomic approach can solve long-standing health and safety challenges in agriculture.
- **Facilitate discussion** on a various risk assessment methodologies that prioritizes the degree and the severity of the risks, enabling farmers to make targeted changes.
- **Develop a collaborative, actionable plan** for implementing ergonomic solutions on different types of farms, from small-scale to large-scale operations.
- **Foster networking and future collaborations** among participants to continue sharing best practices in agricultural health, safety, and policy compliance.

This working group directly contributes to the conference theme *Agricultural workforce development systems* specifically addressing workforce challenges that occur at a grassroots' level that requires sociotechnical interventions collaborated with policy reforms.

Interactive Elements and Discussion Points

This is a great topic for a working group because it's not just about sharing information; it's about practical application and problem-solving. Some ideas for the session:

- **Risk Assessment Deep Dive:** Start with a presentation on current risk assessment methods in agriculture focusing on **human risks**—such as those related to musculoskeletal disorders, falls, and exposure to chemicals. Participants could then be divided into smaller groups to work through a case study of a specific farm, identifying hazards and assessing risks.
- **Ergonomics for All:** A brief presentation on the principles of ergonomics, showing how simple and low-cost changes can make a big difference. This could include things like proper tool selection, work station design, and even adjusting work schedules to reduce repetitive strain. An interactive "tool design" exercise could get groups to think about how to make a common farm task, like harvesting, less physically demanding.
- **Linking to policies:** The core of the session would be a discussion on how the insights from the risk assessment and ergonomics exercises can be documented and presented to meet the policy requirements. The group could brainstorm a "checklist" or "toolkit" that farmers can use to demonstrate compliance and improve their social sustainability. This could include a template for a simple risk assessment report that specifically addresses human health and safety.

OR

Format:

This working group will be a single **1.5-hour session**, designed as a hands-on, problem-solving workshop.

- **Part 1 (20 minutes):** A brief, visually driven presentation will highlight the key principles of agricultural ergonomics, using real-world examples of how simple changes can improve working conditions and productivity.
- **Part 2 (45 minutes):** Participants will be divided into small, diverse groups. Each group will analyze a specific agricultural task (e.g., manual harvesting, equipment maintenance) and use a provided template to identify ergonomic hazards. They will apply various degree-and-severity risk assessment methods to prioritize these risks and then brainstorm practical, low-cost ergonomic solutions.
- **Part 3 (25 minutes):** Each group will present their findings. A moderated discussion will then connect these solutions to the policy (*CAP's social conditionality*) requirements, showing how on-farm ergonomic improvements can be documented to meet policy standards. The session will conclude by outlining a framework for future collaboration on this important topic

The goal is to move the conversation from "policies (*social conditionality*) are/is a burden" to "policies (*social conditionality*) are/is an opportunity to improve farm operations through a better focus on the most important asset: the people who do the work."

Expected Outcome

- Produce a report with key findings and recommendations
- Establish a network of experts for future collaboration
- Develop ideas for joint publications and projects