



Education and Culture DG

Lifelong Learning Programme

BUSINESS SKILLS SELF-ASSESSMENT

in EcoJob-AP (Agricultural Production)

*Training on European Standards for ecological
agricultural production - EcoJob-AP*

**Pilot Project on “Leonardo da Vinci” Programme
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Project Partners:

- Higher School “Agricultural college” - Plovdiv /**Bulgaria**/ - Coordinator and Contractor
- Bulgarian Farmers Association /**Bulgaria**/
- Hobro-Aalborg Farmers Union /**Denmark**/
- University of Thessaly -Faculty of Agriculture/Crop and Animal Production /**Greece**/
- ComuNET Education Solution /**Spain**/
- University of Padova /**Italy**/
- Stichting International Foundation Sustainable Agriculture Training /**the Netherlands**/
- Slovak University of Agriculture - Nitra /**Slovakia**/
- UltimoConsulting /**United Kingdom**/

<http://www.ecojob-ap.org>

Welcome to Eco-Job Business Skills Assessment

Introduction

Eco – Job Business Skill Assessment has been developed specifically for farming businesses – organic or otherwise - that wish to take advantage of the benefits that training and development can offer. Whatever category your business fits into, it is important to recognise that training and development is just as important - if not more important - in a smaller business as it is in any multinational conglomerate.

Eco – Job Business Skill Assessment has been designed to guide you, as the principal in the business, through a structured and logical approach to establishing the business needs. It is however significantly different to other approaches as it incorporates support from an Eco-Job Consultant, and you will be able to consider your development needs in a manner that best suits your business. The review with this support can be completed in 2-3 hours.

So how does it work?

As the business is at the centre of the whole process, it is important to start by considering your business, where it has come from, and broadly where you see it going. You will also need to consider your own personal aims.

The next step is to look at your business in more detail by considering the strengths and weaknesses as they currently exist.

Businesses are dynamic by nature. Change is constantly impacting on every

The main objective of this brochure is to help farmers, managers, experts and others working in the field of agriculture who would like to acquire professional qualifications by developing business skills in ecological agricultural production.

business, so you need to consider how it will impact on yours. Because change of any sort will ultimately affect individuals, it is necessary to take a look at those changes that your business is likely to be subjected to, and to identify and address any development issues that arise.

Having considered how change affects your business you will need to review the key tasks in the organisation - those areas that you feel are critical to the operation of the company. Within every business there are key tasks which have to be achieved if the business is to operate effectively. Skill Assessment will give you an opportunity to take stock of these tasks and examine if they can be improved.

As people are central to success, it is necessary to consider their roles and how they contribute individually to the business. From here we can start to establish potential development areas that could build on the level of experience and expertise already in place. A significant issue to consider here is that of succession planning, particularly in family-based businesses.

Assessing general business skills then provides the final phase of the process. These are skills that are generic to most businesses. The key issue here is to start to identify priorities in terms of development. It is not possible to address every issue of development, but significant benefits can be achieved by addressing those issues that you identify as important to business success.

Finally the process is completed by putting together your own Training and Development plan for the business (or yourself if you are a sole trader). The aim is not to generate a long list of potential training courses, but to establish and address those areas of development that will help your business move in the direction you want in order to achieve business success.

Some of the questions may appear to be irrelevant to your business especially if it is a one – man organisation, and people development may seem

unrealistic but remember your self, your family, any diversification that you may be considering and even those who you employ on a temporary basis – manual workers, semi-skilled and contractors. Experience has shown that concentrating on the questions will assist you to evaluate your business and how to prepare for change.

So now it's over to you.

Business Name

Enter opposite the name of your business and the business principals.

Business Background

The business will have developed over a period of time, be it short or long. The business background is important as it provides the basis for the future, Use the space opposite to consider some of the following:

- How and where did the business start?
- What do you produce?
- How successful do you consider the business has been?
- What areas of the business need developing or building on in the future?
- What new skills will the business need to meet the challenges of the future?
- What new skills are you likely to need in the future?

Business Aims

Every business needs to focus on what it is trying to achieve. If you have a business plan it will say clearly what the business is about, i.e. what it aims to do and how it is likely to develop.

Business planning is the first stage in forward planning and provides the focus for identifying where training can help the business. Whilst you may not have a formal plan, you will have an understanding of where the business is going and how it will get there.

The measure of effective training and development is that it directly relates to helping you achieve your business aims.

Please put your business aims in the box opposite.

Personal Aims

Personal aims are important because they provide a personal focus and stimulus for achieving the business aims. You can then measure success at both business and personal levels.

Personal aims and business aims can be the same, but are normally different. For example, the main aim of your business might be to increase profit by 20% over last year. Your personal aim might be to actually have the time to take up that new hobby you have always wanted to do.

Again, put down your personal aims in the box opposite - remember, they don't have to be sophisticated aims, but they do need to mean something to you.

Business Name:

Name of Business Principals.

Business Background:

Business Aims:

Personal Aims:

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats

In any business there are things that are good and there are things that could be better. There are genuine business opportunities and there are things that threaten the success of the business.

These strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats are important when it comes to identifying training and development needs and require careful consideration.

Using the grid opposite, spend 5 minutes on each of the areas on the left hand side. Be honest! Don't put something in as a 'strength' if it isn't really one. Remember, it is your business that you are thinking about, so be as objective as you can.

Some thoughts to help you are below:

- Strengths**
- What is the business good at?
 - Has the company a strong asset base?
 - Is it the quality of the product?
 - Are the people its strength?
- Weaknesses**
- What are the things that happen that frustrate you?
 - What needs to be improved?
 - What is it that holds the business back?
- Opportunities**
- What potential does the business have?
 - What else could you produce?
 - How could you develop the business further?
- Threats**
- Who is the competition?
 - What factors could restrict business success?
 - What would happen if key individuals left?

Once you have thought through opposite, use the right hand boxes to think about what you might need to do about each area you have identified. Don't be surprised if some of your strengths are also potential weaknesses and so forth. Remember, weaknesses are ultimately potential strengths.

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats

The key strengths of the business are:	Potential development areas to build on strengths:
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The most critical weaknesses of the business are:	Potential development areas to minimise weaknesses:
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The realistic opportunities for the business are:	Potential development areas to realise opportunities:
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The primary threats to the business are:	Potential development areas to minimise threats:
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Changes and Challenges

Every business has to cope with change, the size of business really doesn't matter. From the weather to the exchange rate, from the price of your inputs to the price you get for your product. Change is with us constantly and will be with your business.

From a training and development perspective, change is one of the most important factors a business has to consider. Wherever there is change in the business, somewhere along the line it will have an impact on what someone does, be it you or someone who works with or for you.

The key to making the most of any change, is to manage it, and this can only be done by really considering what the likely impact of that change will be within your business.

There are 3 types of change we need to consider:

External changes - These are changes over which we have little or no control. Legislation, bank interest rates, consumer demands and the weather are examples of external changes.

Internal changes - These are those changes that we do have control over and that we instigate. They include such things as purchasing new equipment, recruiting new staff producing a new product or adopting a new system. With internal changes, the decision to adopt and make the change rests 100% within the business.

Challenges - Linked to internal changes, challenges are those areas where we decide to improve or develop existing processes, people, outputs. Very often the challenge will be to improve production or reduce costs, and again will usually have implications for people.

Take 10 minutes or so and consider those changes and challenges that you believe will have an effect on your business over the next year or so.

For each change or challenge, identify what effect/impact it is likely to have, Will it mean that tasks have to be done differently, and if so, will the individuals that do it need help?

An example of an external change could be as follows:

External change	Impact effect	Possible development
New legislation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff/Self will need to operate to new standard 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff need to update on requirements of new legislation

CHANGES AND CHALLENGES

EXTERNAL CHANGES

What external changes are likely to affect your business?

What impact/effect will these external changes have on your

Areas for possible development

INTERNAL CHANGES

What internal changes are likely to affect your business?

What impact/effect will these internal changes have on your business?

Areas for possible development

CHALLENGES

What challenges is your business likely to face?

What impact/effect will these challenges have on your business?

Areas for possible development

Key Tasks

Now that we have taken time to look at the business, we need to turn to the actual work that is done, and the people that are involved.

Think about your business and the way it operates. Identify the 5 main tasks which are critical to your business? You may be able to identify many more, but take those 5 that you consider have a high level of importance to the success of the business. Put each task down in the appropriate box opposite and for each, consider:

How well is the task done?

How well should the task be done?

Is action needed to improve the task?

How well is the task done? - Use your own words to describe how well the job is done - be honest

How well should the task be done? - You will know just how well each task should be done. You will have a mental picture of what is acceptable and what is not. You will also know when it is being done well, and to the standards that you expect. Again, write this down in the box opposite for each task.

Is action needed to improve the task? - If the task is done well and to the desired standard, there may be no need to take any further action.

If, however, there is a gap between how well the task is done and how well it should be done, then there may well be need for action.

Use the sheet opposite to go through this process.

Finally, are there any tasks that you may need in the future and that will be central to the business success but which currently you do not have the capability of carrying out? - If there are, what do you need to do about them?

Take about 15 minutes to carry out the following exercise.

Note: There are now national EU standards for each and every occupational area. Known as Occupational Standards, they provide clear performance criteria for each occupational area and provide a National Standard against which tasks can be measured. These standards can be translated into qualifications and are known as National Vocational Qualifications. Such Standards may be of help to you in providing a national benchmark.

KEY TASKS

Key Task 1:

How well is the task done?

Could this be improved?

What action is required?

Key Task 2:

How well is the task done?

Could this be improved?

What action is required?

Key Task 3:

How well is the task done?

Could this be improved?

What action is required?

Key Task 4:

How well is the task done?

Could this be improved?

What action is required?

Key Task 5:

How well is the task done?

Could this be improved?

What action is required?

People

Having considered the main tasks, we now need to consider the people who work within the business. In doing so, it is important to consider everyone who contributes to the business, and not just those that might be employed

full-time. This includes you as either the Owner/Manager, any family if this is a family business and other part-time staff, as well as those that work full-time.

For each person, put down their Name and Job Title (even if they don't really have a formal title - the description should give you a feel for the role they play).

Consider people's age and how long they have been in the job. Age and experience are important. Individuals have different needs at different stages of their working life and it is important that, as a manager, you recognise this. A younger person may require more development than an older staff member. An individual moving towards retirement may have experience and expertise that will need to be replaced.

Identify what the individual does. If they have a job description all well and good, but perhaps they don't have one - what do they actually do, and is their job what you think it should be? If job descriptions don't exist, an interesting exercise would be for you to list what you see as being their job and ask them to do the same. You might be surprised at how the two lists differ! If you work in a family business, you may well find that job descriptions don't exist, so there is even more reason to clarify who actually does what.

What are the areas of performance that could/should be improved on? Remember, even experienced people can improve their performance. In fact those who have done the job longest can be the most complacent, and can benefit from being updated in new techniques.

Finally, if you have identified areas where only one individual has the ability to carry out that task - what would happen if that person was unavailable for a period of time? Do you need to develop anyone to provide cover? - What will happen if and when you retire?

Note: We are trying to develop the people in the business to enhance business success, and success for your business may well be a new enterprise or some other diversification we are not trying to find training courses to send people on. If there are no really pressing development needs for an individual, so be it.

People Development Review

Name: _____ **Job Title:** _____

Age: _____ **Years in Job:** _____

What they do well?

What could be improved?

New tasks/responsibilities

Possible/real areas for training/development:

Name: _____ **Job Title:** _____

Age: _____ **Years in job:** _____

What they do well?

What could be improved?

New tasks/responsibilities

Possible/real areas for training/development

Name: _____ **Job Title:** _____

Age: _____ **Years in Job:** _____

What they do well?

What could be improved?

New tasks/responsibilities

Possible/real areas for training/development:

Assessing Performance

Having looked at the business and considered your business Key Tasks and the People Development Review, there is merit in now looking at how well you feel that your business performs across a range of more general business skills.

To do this we need to use a logical approach and consider those skills that axe used in the business. The following pages are designed to provide the basics for you to assess the performance in your own business. To complete the process, look down the lists of skills and in the first column score the existing level of skill across the business.

Use the scale where 1 = poor, 3 satisfactory and 5 = excellent.

When you have done that, use the second column and rate how well the skill should be performed. Use the same scale as before.

Try not to dwell on a skill area - your first reaction will nearly always be the best one.

Leave blank those skill areas that you do not use in the business.

Where you indicate that the skill could be improved or where you don't have the skill, but it would be useful — then indicate how high a priority you think action should be to address the issue. Categorise your priority as follows:

PRIORITY

A - High priority - must action with urgency

B - A priority - must action within 6 months

C - Priority for the next 12 months

D - Not a high priority

Assessing Performance

Skill Area	Current level of skill 1 - 5	Desired level of Skill 1 - 5	Should you have this skill?	Priority for action A - D
Review Business Performance				
Set business objectives				
Assess business performance				
Improve business performance				
Develop Business Plan				
Review existing business				
Determine marketing plan				
Determine production plan				
Develop financial plan				
Plan staffing issues				
Produce business plan				
Implement Business Plan				
Action business plan				
Monitor progress against plan				
Review impact of plan				

Plan Business Finances				
Maintain accounts				
Conduct financial forecasts				
Capital investments decisions				
Manage Business Finances				
Manage cash flows				
Maintain profitability				
Work with financiers				
Improve Own Business Skill				
Measure own performance				
Identify development needs				
Use external advisers				
Record keeping				
People Planning				
Assess business staffing needs				
Identify staff development needs				
Monitor staff performance				
Evaluate plan effectiveness				

Skill Area	Current level of skill 1 - 5	Desired level of skill 1 - 5	Should you have this Skill?	Priority for Action A - D
Management				
People Management				
Time Management				
Staff Training				
Leadership Skills				
Decision Making				
Planning and Organizing				
Communication				
Instructional Skills				
Motivating Staff				
Negotiation Skills				
Quality				
Quality Assured Systems				
Organic standards and legislation				
Information Technology				
Word Processing				
Data Bases				
Spread Sheets				

The following skill areas relate to existing laws and legislation in the EU - these will affect you soon!	Current level of skill	Desired level of skill 1-5	Tick (1) if you should have this skill	Priority for action A-D
Law				
Health and Safety				
Contract Law				
VAT Tax Law				
Employment Law				
Equal Opportunities				
Legislation				
COSHH				
Lift Truck Certification				
First Aid				
Manual Handling				
Risk Assessments -				
Pesticide Certification				
Food Hygiene -				
HACCPS -				
Abrasive Wheels				
Chainsaws				

Assessing Performance

PRACTICAL PRODUCTION SKILL AREA	Current level of skill 1 - 5	Desired level of skill 1 - 5	Tick (1) if you should have this skill	Priority for action A-D
Livestock: eg. welfare, husbandry, rations				
Workshop: eg welding, machine maintenance				
Maintenance: i.e fencing, hedging, tree planting boundary maintenance Construction				

Crop Production (incl. Horticulture) eg. Ploughing. Cultivation, harvesting, agronomy, pest and disease				
Vehicles: e.g. tractors, ATVs. 4x4s Might also include horse/ox cart etc.				
Other areas:				

Development Planning

By completing the Performance Assessment you have completed the process that this review was designed to take you through. As a result, you should have given a significant amount of thought to your business and those people who work within it.

The process has endeavoured to aid you to identify areas where training and development might help the business to achieve success. It has set out to enable you to identify possible areas for development by considering different aspects of the business. The final step in the process is to bring these development areas together and formulate a Development Plan.

The *pro forma* opposite provides a template for such a plan, and the following notes are designed to help you complete it.

In completing the Self-Assessment so far, you will have identified possible development needs throughout the process. You now need to go back through the activities and bring these possible development areas through into column I.

We started by identifying needs under the Changes and Challenges section. Go back to page 7 and look at what you wrote. Bring forward any potential development areas and list them in column 1. Then do the same for the development areas from Key Tasks and the People Development Review (pages 9 and 11). Once you have done this, also bring forward any specific areas from the Performance Assessment. Important areas here will be those that you have identified as a high priority.

Once you have brought forward and listed the Possible Development areas, using the priority rating we used for Assessing Performance (see page 12), decide how high a priority the issue is, and put this in column 2.

You should now have each possible development area prioritised.

For those areas you have allocated as 'A' priorities, you now need to decide which ones you are going to undertake. You can do this by arranging them A1, A2, A) etc. These are the areas you have established as key to taking the business forward. For each of these now complete:

Column 3: Who needs the development?

Column 4: What actual outcomes do you require?

Column 5: How will the development be delivered?

(information on how to access further support is on page 18)

Column 6: Date by which development should be completed

You have now completed the process. You have generated a Development Plan and the Plan is based on a structured review of the business. All you have to do now is action it. If you need help to do this, page 18 can give you some directions to where help is available.

Training and Development Support

Now that you have completed your business development plan, you are in a position to secure the training and development that will help to take your business forward. You may still feel that you need some help and support in securing the quality of training that you require. To help you in this process, the following may be of help.

