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Scaling-out Knowledge: How the Pandemic Helped Spreading the Voice for a More Sustainable Cattle Sector

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Abstract

The adaptation to the restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic included considering new approaches, such as a broader use of information and communication technologies (ICTs). The Colombian Roundtable for Sustainable Cattle (MGS in Spanish) is a multi-actor platform supporting the transformation towards a sustainable cattle sector. The MGS mainly focused on face-to-face activities, such as meetings for information exchange or capacity building events in the field, which had to be stopped once the pandemic had started in Colombia. In order to mitigate the related negative impacts during the strict lockdown, four MGS member institutions (FAO, National University of Colombia, CATIE and Alliance Bioversity-CIAT) decided to organise a virtual seminar series on sustainable beef and dairy systems and value chains. The objective of this article is to describe this effort, its reach and importance for the sector, its viral spread, as well as the lessons learned. The event was comprised by four modules, each with a weekly seminar during four weeks: i) greenhouse gases; ii) biodiversity, landscapes, and ecosystem services; iii) markets and consumers, and iv) agricultural extension. Each module invited experts from different institutions/sectors, to present their (scientific) advances and approaches. Initially aimed at the 53 MGS member institutions in order to keep the exchange active and build capacities, the initiative had an outstanding record of assistance, by reaching an average of 1,300 views/week. The importance of the topics and the viralisation of the initiative gathered people from 23 countries. The feedback received was very positive, and the attendees rated the presenters regarding clarity, level of expertise, time management, and if the goals were reached. About 30 % of the audience were cattle producers, reaching a key stakeholder and contributing to strengthening their capacities regarding the implementation of sustainable production technologies. Other participants came from academia, NGOs, governmental institutions, and private companies. With these promising results and a big database of people interested in sustainable cattle production, the MGS could strengthen its role as actor for a regional dialogue, and contribute to the strengthening of the public policy framework and the formulation of high impact projects for sustainable intensification.

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