

Bioeconomy education as the key to European agricultural development

After three years of collaboration, experimentation, and innovation, the RELIEF project comes to a close. In this newsletter, we share the results of our journey to promote a new approach to agricultural training—one that embraces the potential of the bioeconomy for sustainable rural development and strengthening the workforce.

What if the key to more resilient agri-food systems wasn't just technology, but how we prepare the people behind it?

The RELIEF project, aligned with the EU Bioeconomy Strategy, has developed a comprehensive [training program](#) for farmers, students, and agricultural professionals at university and vocational levels, featuring:

- Flexible learning pathways covering agricultural bioeconomy, entrepreneurship, and soft skills
- Diverse teaching methods, including in-person training, an interactive [e-learning platform](#), and work-based learning to strengthen practical competences

Explore how RELIEF supports a holistic and inclusive bioeconomy education for the future of European agriculture.

RELIEF pilot training: what did we learn?

Between September 2024 and February 2025, the RELIEF training was tested in four countries, involving over 450 learners across diverse agricultural contexts. The pilot phase helped us validate and refine our educational approach—bringing together innovation, local relevance, and hands-on learning.

How did it work in practice?

Let's take a look at the results and experiences on the ground.

What we explored:

Learners' engagement and feedback on training content and methods

- In Italy, the vast majority of the learners expressed their high satisfaction with the RELIEF methodology and the training content
- In Greece, over 80% of the learners were fully satisfied with the materials, the content, and the usability of the e-learning platform.
- In Sweden the vast majority of the learners at both levels found the WBL activities very relevant to the topics covered through the piloting and it was perceived as a good and inspiring learning opportunity
- In Portugal, 40.9% of the trainees expressed their confidence to apply the new knowledge acquired in their job, whilst 54.5% of them felt fairly on this aspect.

Trainers' insights into the delivery process

- Portuguese trainers appreciated the RELIEF course, especially its engaging methodology for both trainees and trainers. The international scope of the course, taught in various countries, made the content broader and more inclusive.
- The Greek trainers emphasized that WBL has the potential to transform the knowledge acquired by the trainees into skills and to be more effective in the consolidation of these skills.

- Italian trainers appreciated the interactive approach of the RELIEF curricula, which fostered active participation and discussions, creating a dynamic learning experience. The methodology enhanced problem-solving and analytical skills, essential for preparing participants for real-world challenges.
- The Swedish trainers found very interesting the modular design of the curricula, thus making both teaching and learning more flexible.





Key lessons for future training initiatives in the agri-food bioeconomy

- In all the partner countries, the element of work-based learning was perceived by all the participants at both levels of education as having a high added value, providing practical experiences that increase the relevance of the education and bridging the gap between theory and practice.
- Course content that communicates complex aspects in the field of bioeconomy in the agricultural sector, especially in the context of precision agriculture, engages the learners and sparks their motivation to explore the topic further.

Testimonies from the field

- *"This course is essential for farmers and it should be continued."*
- *"The platform is very practical since it gathers more tools in one single place."*
- *"I have finally come to understand the concept of bioeconomy and its application in agricultural practices."*
- *"I am aware that there is always a better way to do things and that there is a need to be environmentally friendly."*
- *"I have seen how smart farming and technology in general can help farmers and the environment at the same time."*

Training experiences from the field

- **Italy** – Discover how learners explored bioeconomy in agriculture and connected it to local rural innovation:  [Read the full story](#).
- **Greece** – Learn how the pilot supported energy transition solutions in agri-food systems  [Read the article](#)
- **Sweden** – Explore the focus on emerging value chains, circular economy, and green skills in vocational training  [Read the article](#)
- **Portugal** – See how students in the Azores explored climate-smart agriculture during the RELIEF pilot training!  Read the posts on LinkedIn [1](#), [2](#)

Work-Based Learning in RELIEF: education meets experience

Integrating education with hands-on experience is key to preparing future professionals for the challenges of a greener, more digital agri-food sector. That's why RELIEF adopted a **Work-Based Learning (WBL)** approach: a flexible model combining classroom teaching, online modules, and real-world practice.

Through internships, workshops, and field visits, learners applied bioeconomy concepts directly in agricultural settings—bridging the gap between theory and practice, and gaining skills relevant to their local job markets.



Italy

In Sicily, students explored **advanced technologies for agriculture**, including drones for crop monitoring and automated tractors. Training combined in-person sessions, e-learning, and fieldwork, thanks to a collaboration with the University of Palermo.

→ [Read more about the experience in Sicily.](#)



Greece

A training on **Circular Economy in agriculture** was offered through blended learning and included a study visit to the **GEO.Solution composting centre**. Participants saw how composting prevents desertification, enhances productivity, and reduces emissions.

→ [Read more about the experience](#)



Sweden

SwIdeas involved learners in **green skills and circular economy** training through workshops at [Alnarp's Farm](#) and a study visit to [Nordvästra Skånes Renhållnings AB's](#). The experience connected vocational training with sustainable innovation in waste management and local agriculture.

→ [Discover the full story](#)



Portugal

Students from the University of the Azores visited a local ecological farm as part of their hands-on training. They explored sustainable farming practices and reflected on the importance of responsible production.

→ Read the post on [LinkedIn](#) or [Facebook](#)

Bioeconomy in action: how policies and education can transform agriculture

As the EU Bioeconomy Strategy is updated in 2025, RELIEF highlights the importance of focusing on education and skills development in agriculture. Our experience has shaped key policy recommendations outlined in two policy briefs.

Integrating bioeconomy into agricultural education:

- Build a database of bioeconomy education programs in EU agriculture.
- Develop public demonstration sites to showcase sustainable agricultural technologies.
- Integrate bioeconomy into VET curricula and create new bioeconomy-focused programs.
- Foster collaboration between education, advisory services, and businesses to promote individualized learning, micro-credentials, and circularity in training.

Creating a bioeconomy learning platform for farmers

- Create national bioeconomy hubs for knowledge-sharing and innovation.
- Support organic and regenerative farming practices.
- Invest in research to reduce agriculture's environmental impact.
- Provide training to equip farmers with sustainable farming skills.
- These actions could help reduce agriculture's environmental footprint, boost rural resilience, and support the EU's sustainability goals for 2030 and 2050.

Read the full Policy Briefs: <https://relief.uop.gr/policy-briefs/>



Strengthening learning communities: join the RELIEF Hubs!

The RELIEF project goes beyond providing training by fostering strong learning communities through its Hubs, set up in Italy, Sweden, Greece, and Portugal. These local networks are designed to promote bioeconomy in agriculture, offering opportunities for professionals and stakeholders to connect, share knowledge, and stay informed about events, funding opportunities, and best practices. By joining a local Hub, members will gain access to valuable resources to help implement bioeconomy practices in farming. The four local Hubs can be reached through LinkedIn groups and anyone interested in bioeconomy practices can be part of this growing community:

- Italy <https://lnkd.in/d5g8AhNy>
- Sweden https://lnkd.in/dEEg_piA
- Greece <https://lnkd.in/dNFKFYK5>
- Portugal <https://lnkd.in/d3yp8CQx>

Save the Date: RELIEF Final Conference in Kalamata, Greece

The final conference of the RELIEF project will be held on **20–21 May 2025** in **Kalamata**, Greece.

Venue: University of the Peloponnese, Antikalamos Campus, Kalamata

[View location on Google Maps.](#)

We are pleased to invite you to join us for this key event where we will share the main achievements of the RELIEF project. During the conference, we will explore innovative teaching and training approaches

aimed at strengthening skills and knowledge in the field of rural bioeconomy and discuss how to promote a circular and sustainable bioeconomy mindset across the agri-food sector.

Confirmed **keynote speakers**:

- *Prof. Panagiotis Liargovas* – Chairman of the Board of the Centre of Planning and Economic Research (KEPE) and of the National Productivity Board and Professor of Economics at the University of Peloponnese
- *Prof. Georgios Zakynthinos* – Professor of the Department of Public and Community Health at University of Western Attica

The conference will be hosted by our Coordinator, the **University of the Peloponnese**.

Stay tuned for the full agenda and registration details!

About Relief

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