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Sustainable Farms Visits — Report English Version



GROW
LIFE

Document information sheet

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Executive Summary

Agriculture is a cornerstone of food security. At the same time, it is a major driver of environmental change. In response to this pressing challenge, the GrowLIFE project was launched to support the transition toward a more sustainable and climate-resilient food system in mainland Portugal. Funded by the EU LIFE Programme, the project aligns with key European strategies such as the Green Deal and Farm to Fork. Its goals include promoting universal access to healthy food, improving farmer livelihoods, and regenerating ecosystems through systemic, multi-actor collaboration.

A key activity of GrowLIFE is the Participatory Visits to Sustainable Farms, which bring together farmers, researchers, local authorities, and other stakeholders in hands-on learning environments. Held on reference farms, these field-based exchanges showcase agroecological practices—such as soil regeneration, biodiversity integration, and local marketing strategies—while fostering peer-to-peer knowledge sharing and co-creation of context-specific solutions.

The first four visits have demonstrated the value of horizontal learning. Despite diverse local contexts and ongoing structural challenges, these events have strengthened local networks, surfaced critical insights, and laid the groundwork for broader collaboration across Portugal's food system.

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Introduction

Agriculture is both a cornerstone of food security and a major driver of environmental change. According to the European Environment Agency, it is the fifth largest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. In light of these intersecting challenges, transforming how we produce, distribute, and consume food is not only an environmental imperative, but also a social and economic necessity—essential for ensuring livelihoods, public health, and long-term food security.

GrowLIFE was created to respond to this challenge by promoting a more sustainable and climate-resilient food system across mainland Portugal. It is coordinated by the Faculty of Sciences of the University of Lisbon, in partnership with FCIências.ID and the Schools of Hospitality and Tourism of Turismo de Portugal and is funded by the EU LIFE Programme for Environment and Climate Action.

Aligned with key European policy frameworks—such as the European Green Deal, the European Climate Pact, and the Farm to Fork Strategy—GrowLIFE adopts a systemic approach that links sustainable production with responsible consumption. Its overarching objectives are to ensure universal access to healthy and sustainable food, support farmers' livelihoods, and protect and regenerate the environment.

To achieve this, GrowLIFE implements a diverse set of activities designed to engage multiple actors across the food system. These include:

- Participatory Visits to Sustainable Farms
- Sustainability Routes
- Farmers Open Days
- Training Sessions for Chefs and Students in the Hospitality, Restaurant and Catering (HoReCa) sector

Each activity responds to different needs and target audiences but shares a common methodology focused on collaborative learning, stakeholder involvement, and contextualized solutions.

At the heart of the project's implementation are three core approaches:

- **Participatory Methods** – Involving stakeholders from the outset enhances their sense of ownership and fosters more effective, grounded solutions.
- **Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration** – The complexity of food systems requires the engagement of all actors—from producers and policymakers to consumers and chefs—to drive meaningful and lasting change.
- **Peer-to-Peer Knowledge Transfer** – Exchange among peers—especially among

farmers—has proven highly effective in generating relevant, context-specific learning and encouraging practical adoption of sustainable techniques.

Among these activities, Participatory Visits serve as a central tool to foster knowledge exchange and agroecological transition. These field-based learning events bring together producers and territorial actors to explore concrete practices for sustainability, enabling dialogue, collaboration, and the co-creation of solutions rooted in local realities.

The following chapter outlines the conceptual foundations of Participatory Visits, followed by summaries of the first four visits held under the GrowLIFE project.

1. What are the Participatory Visits to Sustainable Farms

Participatory Visits are field-based exchanges held on reference farms that showcase practices for the sustainable management of natural resources within agricultural, forestry, and animal husbandry systems. Their main objective is to enable farmers and key local actors — including municipal representatives, researchers, producer organizations, and consumers — to learn directly from practical experiences that support the transition to more ecological and resilient agri-food systems.

These visits promote learning-by-doing and peer-to-peer knowledge exchange, creating spaces where farmers and participants can engage in collective reflection and observation. Unlike conventional training models, Participatory Visits emphasize horizontal learning, where knowledge flows in multiple directions and is shaped by the diversity of experiences, challenges, and innovations shared among participants.

The visits are grounded in real-life farm settings, offering concrete examples of sustainable strategies such as:

- Reduction or elimination of the use of synthetic pesticides
- Soil conservation and erosion control
- Production and use of ecological biopreparations
- Incorporation of functional biodiversity in farm design
- Green manure use and permanent soil cover
- Local and direct sales systems
- Management of organic and non-organic waste

Participatory Visits validate and elevate the experiential knowledge of farmers who have undergone or are undergoing agroecological transitions. This includes traditional practices and biocultural memory — the collective knowledge, values, and techniques developed over time through the interaction between humans and their ecosystems.

These visits are designed with a participatory methodology that encourages active engagement. Host farmers and facilitators co-create the agenda, fostering dialogue and interaction between producers, technical experts, and community members. By doing so, Participatory Visits help strengthen local networks, foster collaboration, and raise awareness around sustainable production and responsible consumption.

Whether held on conventional farms exploring sustainable alternatives or on already-transitioned farms deepening existing practices, Participatory Visits provide critical opportunities to explore how agroecological approaches can be implemented and adapted across different territorial realities.

2. Event Summaries

Visit #1

Farm:	Papafigos. Bio, Quinta do Figueiral
Location:	Ereira, Cartaxo
Date:	23/06/2024
Number of Participants:	9 (5 participants, 3 members of the GrowLIFE Team, 1 host farmer)

The first Participatory Visit of the GrowLIFE project took place on Sunday, June 23, at the PAPAFIGOS.BIO a 2,5ha farm in Cartaxo. The day was structured in two parts: a morning session open to consumers and the general public, and an afternoon activity dedicated to local farmers. During the morning, participants were guided through the farm by host farmer Rodolfo Pereira, while the GrowLIFE team attended as observers, engaging informally with the group.

In the afternoon, the formal activity with farmers unfolded according to the planned agenda. Although attendance was modest, due to coordination challenges with local partners, limited outreach time, and the fact that the area surrounding the host farm is not home to many horticultural producers, as it mainly focuses on grapes and wheat, the participants were highly engaged and open to sharing experiences and knowledge. Their strong interest in the project and willingness to participate in future activities were positive outcomes.

The session began with introductions by the GrowLIFE team, and the participants followed by a guided tour of the host farm, which has been managed using agroecological practices for over two decades and is certified for organic production. The tour offered an opportunity to explore key aspects of the agroecological transition, such as biodiversity conservation, the creation of biological corridors, soil fertility strategies, and integrated crop systems.

After the visit, participants attended a two-part presentation. The first introduced the GrowLIFE project, including its objectives, scope, and areas of intervention. The second, led by agronomist Claudia Barrera, outlined the theoretical framework that will guide GrowLIFE's support for agroecological transition in farms and in the surrounding territory. Key concepts such as biocultural memory, functional diversity, multifunctional plants, and the importance of record-keeping and farm planning were shared and discussed.

Following a short break, the session closed with a group discussion facilitated by Carlota Sanches from the GrowLIFE team. Farmers reflected on their understanding of agroecology, its viability, and their impressions of the session. Feedback was positive, particularly regarding the clarity of the concepts presented and the relevance of the content. Participants expressed a clear interest in future workshops focused on practical aspects of agroecological transition and emphasized the value of such events in breaking isolation, fostering peer learning, and encouraging collaboration.

Visit # 2

Farm:	Biogoods, Quinta da Capela
Location:	Cinfães
Date:	30/10/2024
Number of Participants:	15 participants and 3 members of the GrowLIFE team

The second Participatory Visit of the GrowLIFE project took place on Biogoods, a 12-hectare certified organic farm in Cinfães. The terraced land supports blueberries, apples, vegetables, and forested zones. The varied soil types and forest integration enable multifunctional plant use and microorganism collection, promoting a holistic agroecological system. The farm uses drip irrigation and supplies both national and export markets.

The session brought together local farmers, municipal technicians from São Pedro do Sul and Ponte de Lima, and representatives from Biotedo. Following a presentation on the project's aims and methodology, participants introduced themselves to foster trust and a spirit of shared learning.

The guided tour, led by the host farmer, provided insight into the farm's crop systems and highlighted challenges in reducing reliance on external inputs. This sparked a rich discussion and led to an impromptu hands-on session on the use of multifunctional plants and rice traps to capture efficient microorganisms.

Participant farmers engaged actively, sharing practical knowledge on pest and weed management, green manures, and biomass generation. Their input enriched the group dialogue and reinforced the value of horizontal knowledge exchange.

An informal coffee break allowed for deeper exchanges on local resource use and strategies to enhance the value of small-scale production. A collective reflection focused on the agroecological practices observed, such as pesticide-free production, water efficiency, and biodiversity enhancement through multifunctional plants.

In the preparation phase of the visit, the host farmers had identified interest in exploring the role of efficient microorganisms in agroecological transition. Responding to this, the GrowLIFE team facilitated a dedicated workshop addressing topics such as allelopathic effects in weed suppression, green manure use for biomass production, maintaining permanent soil cover, and supporting functional soil fauna diversity.

The participants concluded the day by completing an evaluation questionnaire and offering suggestions for future actions. Their feedback reflected a strong desire to continue participating in similar initiatives. Among the priority topics identified were ecological pest and disease management, agroecological farm design and planning, and techniques for propagating and managing multifunctional plants.

Visit # 3

Farm:	Courela dos Pegos
Location:	Pinhal Novo, Setúbal
Date:	21/11/2024
Number of Participants:	12 participants and 3 members of the GrowLIFE team

The GrowLIFE project's third participatory visit took place at the 40ha ecological farm "Courela dos Pegos" in Setúbal, bringing together local farmers, representatives from the Setúbal City Council and international students, from France and Brazil, as part of the GrowLIFE team. The visit aimed to support the agroecological transition in farmers' fields, strengthen local territorial networks, and foster collaborative learning among agricultural stakeholders.

The host farmer shared the evolution of his production system, now fully ecological and geared toward local markets. A guided tour allowed participants to observe cultivation practices, explore the reasoning behind the shift to ecological methods, and discuss challenges related to production, marketing, and resource management. Key takeaways included strategies for reducing reliance on synthetic inputs, improving soil health, and meeting consumer demand for clean, local food.

A group discussion following the visit enabled a rich exchange of experiences. Farmers highlighted the need for better local market infrastructure that ensures visibility and fairness for organic producers, as well as shared sales spaces with conventional producers to level the playing field. The host's experience with direct sales and consumer engagement served as a practical example.

Other key themes included the use of digital tools and online platforms to expand market access, the importance of forming cooperatives or farmer associations to pool resources and strengthen collective bargaining, and the need for fairer pricing models that reflect the true value of agroecological products. Public sector representatives emphasized their willingness to support farmers with information on subsidies, tax incentives, and available funding programs.

The visit concluded with a strong sense of shared purpose, with participants expressing interest in continued collaboration and learning. The session underscored the importance of direct dialogue between farmers and public institutions and highlighted how participatory exchanges can help build a more equitable and sustainable local food system.

Visit # 4

Farm:	Miracle Berries
Location:	Pindelo dos Milagres
Date:	30/04/2025
Number of Participants:	15 participants and 1 member of the GrowLIFE team

The GrowLIFE project held a participatory visit at the agroecological 1ha farm "Miracle Berries" in São Pedro do Sul, bringing together local farmers, municipal technicians, and researchers from the Polytechnic Institute of Viseu and the research center CERNAS. The activity aimed to observe agroecological practices in context, promote peer learning, and strengthen territorial networks around sustainable food systems.

The farm, with organic certification and focused on small fruit production for national and export markets, covers approximately one hectare of flat, acidic soil with a drip irrigation system. This was the first visit held at this site, marking the farmers' recent integration into the GrowLIFE network.

After an initial presentation of the project's objectives and methodology, the group engaged in an open round of introductions to establish trust and collaborative spirit. A guided farm tour provided insight into crop systems, pest and disease management strategies, and key challenges in reducing reliance on external inputs—even within organic production. These themes sparked rich discussion and led to a hands-on workshop on the role of multifunctional plants in agroecological transition.

The workshop addressed topics such as allelopathic effects for weed control, biomass generation through green manures, permanent soil cover, and support for beneficial soil fauna. Throughout the session, women participants showed strong leadership in sharing techniques and identifying good practices.

An informal product tasting followed, where value-added processing methods were showcased, reinforcing the importance of local resource use and product diversification. The visit concluded with a collective reflection on observed practices, emphasizing pesticide-free production, water efficiency, and increasing functional biodiversity through the strategic use of multifunctional plants.

This participatory exchange deepened technical understanding and reinforced the importance of collaboration between farmers, researchers, and public institutions. It demonstrated the potential of peer-to-peer learning in supporting agroecological transitions and enhancing the resilience and sustainability of local farming systems.

The farmers who participated in the visit expressed a desire to continue collaborating with the GrowLIFE project and to receive support for initiating an agroecological transition on their farms starting in the next agricultural cycle.

Conclusion

The first four Participatory Visits under the GrowLIFE project demonstrated the value of peer-to-peer learning and territorial collaboration in supporting the agroecological transition. Despite varying contexts and farm profiles, all visits created spaces for open dialogue, hands-on learning, and meaningful exchange among farmers, technicians, researchers, and local institutions.

Key themes emerged across the visits: the importance of reducing external inputs, the role of multifunctional plants in enhancing biodiversity and soil health, and the value of direct-to-consumer models for strengthening local food systems. Farmers expressed a strong interest in practical training on ecological pest and disease management, farm planning, and resource conservation strategies. Participants played a central role in sharing experiential knowledge, reinforcing the power of horizontal exchange.

The visits also revealed systemic challenges, such as the need for better market infrastructure and greater institutional support. Still, participants consistently highlighted the benefits of these gatherings in breaking isolation, fostering trust, and catalysing future collaboration. As the project progresses, Participatory Visits will continue to serve as a cornerstone of GrowLIFE's efforts to build resilient, inclusive, and ecologically sound food systems across Portugal.

Annexes

4.1 Invitation Agendas

i. Invitation Agenda – Participatory Visit #1, Papafigos.BIO



PROGRAMA ATIVIDADE
VISITAS PARTICIPATIVAS COM AGRICULTORES E STAKEHOLDERS
AGRICULTOR: RODOLFO PEREIRA - PAPAFIGOS.BIO
Roteiro para Cartaxo, domingo 23 de Junho de 2024

TEMA: Visita participativa com agricultoras/es

Objetivos:

- Apoiar na transição agroecológica dos agricultores no campo
- Colaborar no fortalecimento das redes territoriais para a transição para um sistema alimentar mais sustentável

Tipo de participantes: Agricultoras/es; Agentes Locais e representantes de organizações governamentais e não governamentais.

Duração: 04:30 horas (meio-dia)

PROGRAMA

Tempo	Atividade (objetivo)	Responsável
14:00 - 14:20	Receção de participantes, entrega de programa e materiais, identificação	• Equipa GrowLIFE presente na atividade
14:20 - 14:40	Dinâmica de boas-vindas + apresentação Carlota	• Carlota Sanches (facilitação)
14:40 - 16:00	Visita guiada ao campo	• Rodolfo Pereira (agricultor anfitrião)
16:10 - 17:00	Conversa: Considerações gerais para iniciar uma transição agroecológica	• Claudia Barrera-Salas & Rodolfo Pereira
17:00 - 17:15	Coffee Break (descanso/café)	• Equipa GrowLIFE
17:15 - 18:00	Oficina de Biopreparados	• Claudia Barrera-Salas
18:00 - 18:30	OMP*: avaliação, reflexão e projeção	• Carlota Sanches/ Apoio Equipa GrowLIFE
18:30 a 18:45	Limpeza e arrumação, agradecimento aos anfitriões.	• Equipa GrowLIFE

*OMP= Oficina conduzida utilizando Metodologias Participativas para encerrar a atividade, e para planificar o acompanhamento dos agricultores já integrados no projeto e dos que pretendam aderir ao projeto.



ii. Invitation Agenda – Participatory Visit #2, BIOGOODS



PROGRAMA ATIVIDADE
VISITAS PARTICIPATIVAS COM AGRICULTORES E STAKEHOLDERS
AGRICULTOR: JORGE E SOFIA SANTOS – BIOGOODS
Roteiro: Cinfães, 30 de outubro de 2024

Objetivos:

- Apoiar na transição agroecológica dos agricultores no campo
- Colaborar no fortalecimento das redes territoriais para a transição para um sistema alimentar mais sustentável

Tipo de participantes: Agricultoras/es; Agentes Locais e representantes de organizações governamentais e não governamentais.

Duração: 04:30 horas (meio-dia)

PROGRAMA

Tempo	Atividade (objetivo)	Responsável
09:00 – 09:30	Receção de participantes, entrega de programa e materiais, identificação	• Equipa GrowLIFE presente na atividade
09:30 – 09:40	Dinâmica de boas-vindas + apresentação Carlota	• Carlota (facilitação)
09:40 – 10:40	Visita guiada ao campo	• Jorge Santos (anfitrião)
10:40 – 11:00	Coffee Break (descanso/café)	• Equipa GrowLIFE
11:00 – 11:40	Conversa: Considerações gerais para iniciar uma transição agroecológica	• Claudia Barrera-Salas e Jorge Santos
11:40 – 12:30	Oficina de Biopreparados	• Claudia Barrera-Salas y Thelma Soul e Jorge Santos
12:30 – 13:00	OMP*: avaliação, reflexão e projeção	• Claudia Barrera e Carlota Sanchez (facilitação) - Apoio Equipa GrowLIFE

*OMP= Oficina conduzida utilizando Metodologias Participativas para encerrar a atividade, e para planificar o acompanhamento dos agricultores já integrados no projeto e dos que pretendam aderir ao projeto.



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iii. Invitation Agenda – Participatory Visit #3, Courela dos Pegos



PROGRAMA ATIVIDADE

VISITAS PARTICIPATIVAS COM AGRICULTORES E STAKEHOLDERS AGRICULTOR: JOÃO PEDRO FEVEIREIRO – COURELA DOS PEGOS

Roteiro: Palmela, 21 de novembro 2024

Objetivos:

- Apoiar na transição agroecológica dos agricultores no campo
- Colaborar no fortalecimento das redes territoriais para a transição para um sistema alimentar mais sustentável

Tipo de participantes: Agricultoras/es; Agentes Locais e representantes de organizações governamentais e não governamentais.

Duração: 04:30 horas (meio-dia)

PROGRAMA

Tempo	Atividade (objetivo)	Responsável
09:00 – 09:30	Receção de participantes, entrega de programa e materiais, identificação	• Equipa GrowLIFE presente na atividade
09:30 – 11:30	Visita guiada ao campo	• João Pedro Fevereiro (anfitrião)
11:00 – 11:30	Coffee Break (descanso/café)	• Equipa GrowLIFE
11:00 – 12:00	Conversa: Considerações gerais para iniciar uma transição agroecológica (projeto GrowLIFE)	• Claudia Barrera- Salas e João Pedro Fevereiro
12:30 – 13:00	OMP*: avaliação, reflexão e projeção	• Facilitação: equipa GrowLIFE y João Pedro Fevereiro

iv. Invitation Agenda – Participatory Visit #4, Miracle Berries



PROGRAMA ATIVIDADE
VISITAS PARTICIPATIVAS: UMA FERRAMENTA PARA FORTALECER
EL TRABALHO EM TRE AGRICULTORES
EXPLORAÇÃO: Miracle Berries
Roteiro: Pindelo dos Milagres, 30 de abril DE 2025

Objetivos:

- Apoiar na transição agroecológica dos agricultores no campo
- Colaborar no fortalecimento das redes territoriais para a transição para um sistema alimentar mais sustentável

Tipo de participantes: Agricultoras/és; Agentes Locais e representantes de organizações governamentais e não governamentais.

Duração: 04:30 horas (meio-dia)

PROGRAMA

Tempo	Atividade (objetivo)	Responsável
14:00 – 14:15	Receção de participantes, apresentações, dinâmica de boas-vindas	• Anfitriões e equipa GrowLIFE presente na atividade
14:15 – 15:45	Visita guiada à exploração	• Angela Abreu (anfitriões)
16:00 – 16:30	Coffee Break (descanso/café)	• Equipa GrowLIFE e anfitriões
16:30 – 17:15	Conversa: sobre integração de Plantas Multifuncionais na Transição Agroecológica das explorações	• Claudia Barrera-Salas GrowLIFE
17:15 – 18:30	Avaliação, reflexão e projeção	• Claudia Barrera-Salas (facilitação) apoio Equipa GrowLIFE



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4.2 Photos

- i. **Papafigos.BIO**
- ii. **BIOGOODS**
- iii. **Courela dos Pegos**
- iv. **Miracle Berries**

Annex 4.2 — Images and Attendance lists

Papa Figos. BIO (Cartaxo) — 23/06/2024

Participants: 9





Papa Figos. BIO (Cartaxo) — 23/06/2024



Papa Figos. BIO (Cartaxo) — 23/06/2024



Biogoods (Cinfães) — 30/10/2024

Participants: 15









Participants: 11







Participants: 15



