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Case Study: RISE method for training in sustainable agriculture

Rhine-Waal University of Applied Sciences uses RISE for practical teaching

Sustainable agriculture means a balancing of social, ecological and economic aspects. Conflicting objectives are inevitable. How can students learn to deal with these trade-offs and develop solutions for greater sustainability?

Teaching at the Rhine-Waal University of Applied Sciences (Hochschule Rhein-Waal) strongly focuses on practice-oriented approaches. RISE helps lecturers to translate sustainability into real-life farming practice.



Rhine-Waal University of Applied Sciences

Since its establishment in 2009, Rhine-Waal University of Applied Sciences in Kleve and Kamp-Lintfort has been offering a wide range of Bachelor's and Master's degree programmes, covering anything from life sciences, economics and engineering to social sciences, sociology and health sciences. The university focuses on interdisciplinary and applied research. This is also reflected in its sustainable agriculture programmes. Managing agricultural production in a sustainable manner entails that it may not be possible to find compromises between all conflicting objectives. Students have to learn to understand conflicting objectives, to balance them and to propose solutions.

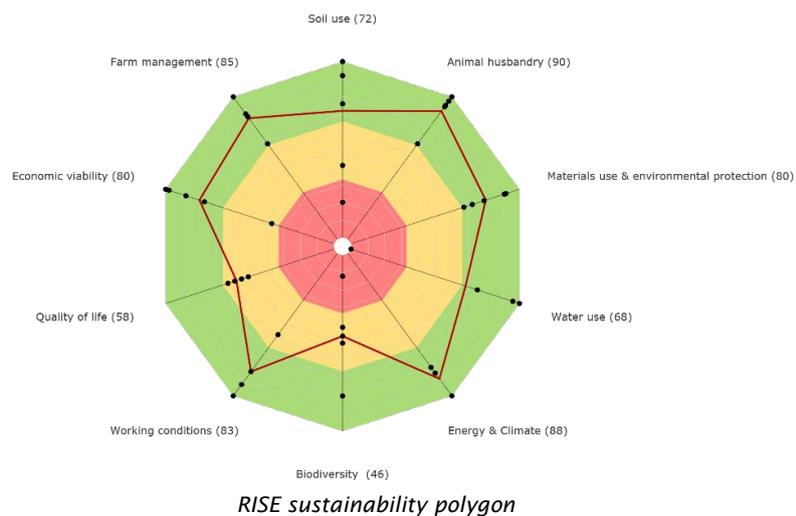
Why RISE?

In the «Sustainability Analysis of International Supply Chains» module, Professor Dr. Dagmar Mithöfer therefore employs RISE* among other methods. In the process, students learn about relevant sustainability themes and apply these directly to a farm holding that they analyse using the RISE method. In working groups they prepare the 10 RISE themes, collect data during a farm visit and analyse the results. They also compare their results to a virtual farm that is typical of the region and was developed within the RISE software based on regional data. Moreover, students have been using RISE as part of their theses to analyse a specific farm and develop measures to improve the farm's sustainability.

Results and benefits

RISE uses a radar chart to visualise an overview of the assessment results. The software displays the 46 indicators in detail so that the students can understand and critically question the results. They can see how the assessment is constructed, e.g. for «soil organic matter» or «greenhouse gas balance». But social issues such as working conditions and economic aspects such as economic viability are also assessed. This holistic approach is ideal for Professor Mithöfer, because in her modules students with a background in production technology come together with students from business administration backgrounds. RISE serves as a tool to translate between the disciplines and thus promotes exchange and mutual learning. In the analysis part, at the latest, the students will face conflicting

objectives, often between biodiversity and economic concerns.



«Triggering a process of reflection»

A special feature of RISE is its advisory approach. As a result of the dialogue-based method – an interview with the farmer being the main source of data – RISE also initiates processes that are not quantifiable. It often initiates a process of reflection in which less visible issues come to the fore. Especially social indicators such as «quality of life» often bring about sensitive but important discussions and, in turn, learning processes for farmers and students alike. Dagmar Mithöfer describes her experience as follows:



«RISE helps me to convey the complexity of sustainable agriculture and to directly put it into practice. The advisory approach is an important part of this.»

Prof. Dr. Dagmar Mithöfer

What is RISE

RISE is an acronym for Response-Inducing Sustainability Evaluation. RISE assesses ecological, economic and social sustainability performance across 10 themes captured by a total of 46 indicators. The results provide a “360-degree view” of the farm and identify where there is potential for optimisation. RISE was developed at HAFL and has so far been used on almost 4,000 farms in 59 countries.

Contact

Feel free to contact us at any time for a no-strings discussion of your ideas or questions:

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