

Thematic Group on CAP Strategic Plans: Towards Implementation

Synthesis of key topics discussed

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Introduction

The [Thematic group](#) came together to identify key topics, exchange on approaches and areas of common interest, and explore early models of CSP implementation. In the course of conversations during the [1st Thematic Group \(TG\) meeting](#) members agreed to host a number of informal meetings on the key topics identified in the first meeting. Those informal sessions focused on the following areas:

1. Opportunities across the two CSP funds (EAFRD & EAGF)
2. Regionalised Countries
3. Monitoring Committees

The [2nd TG meeting](#) enabled members to further discuss the above issues, consider how peer exchanges and learning between Member States (MS) could be applied and identified future opportunities for thematic work on CAP Strategic Plan (CSP) implementation.

The following text summarises what came out across all discussions on each of the three key topics identified above, highlighting the key points emphasised by TG Members during those conversations.

1. Opportunities across the two CSP funds

The focus of this discussion centred around the green architecture, particularly the interactions between conditionality, eco-schemes and environmental-climate commitments. Members suggested that in some countries farmers were finding it difficult to understand how interventions related to EAFRD & EAGF were being implemented and therefore which schemes were available to them. Various reasons were offered by members, most notably that decision makers lacked the capacity or policy knowledge to set out the “how and why” around interventions that have been put in place and the outcomes envisaged.

At the heart of this, is being able to communicate effectively what the policies are seeking to achieve and government expectations of farmers, particularly where connections between conditionality requirements, eco-schemes and environment-climate commitments are concerned.



Some Member States had organised a range of communications for farmers, including videos and webinars as well as expert discussions for farmers to discuss the technical dimensions of the interventions under the EAGF, with input from advisers, experts from Managing Authorities and Paying Agencies on hand. Putting in place effective means of communication and guidelines is a prerequisite to understanding how to apply the interventions effectively.

Eco-schemes and environment-climate commitments in some Member States have been programmed together in an integrated way with the intention of making life easier for the farmer and to ensure that the streamlining of communication and forms etc, is consistent and coherent. In other Member States, the two are not programmed together, but information is provided by the Managing Authority to enable farmers to choose the most relevant package of support that suits their needs and the needs of specific land parcels. For the most part, Member States have adopted an entirely digital approach to applications across both types of interventions, although in some cases this is done at the office of the Paying Agency or via an adviser.

Some members thought that the availability of multiple schemes was resulting in confusion for the end user. Again, clear communication has a role to play in clarifying the purpose of different schemes and how they can be combined. Members acknowledged that this does not mean that farmers do not understand the eco-schemes or environment-climate commitments, rather it is the interdependencies and complexities involved that are confusing and the need for them to think about whether or how to engage with both types of schemes when seeking support.

Initial insights from some Member States show a low uptake of eco-schemes (as of Spring 2023) with the allocation of underspent budget causing countries problems, although this was not an issue in all countries. It was suggested that the introduction of the new eco-schemes with new procedures, on top of new conditionality requirements, may be causing initial hesitancy on the part of potential beneficiaries.

Members considered that the rollout of interventions under EAGF had not been as smooth as it could have been in some Member States, for example with low uptake of some eco-schemes, and others being criticised for being far too complex. Members agreed that it will take time for everyone to understand such interventions, including how they can benefit from the investment opportunities. Members also suggested that simplification has not happened (yet) and acknowledged that 2024 may see improved uptake once these early results and further insights have helped all parties ensure that interventions are fit for purpose.



Members also noted that amendments by Member States are now starting to or have already been considered, particularly with respect to conditionality requirements, with farmers comparing implementation in different countries and asking for changes based on such insights. Any amendments will need to be developed in a timely manner if due process is to be observed, e.g. engagement with Monitoring Committees, Strategic Environment Assessment, public/stakeholder engagement etc. Members viewed possible difficulties given tight windows for revision and approval by the European Commission, which could be complicated by key regulatory reforms, for example changes to the LULUCF and ESR regulations and the need for Managing Authorities to demonstrate whether amendments are required to their CSPs to meet the new targets identified.

2. Implementation in regionalised countries

Members recognised that under the new CAP there is scope for CAP support under EAFRD to be adapted and implemented at the regional level.

Members highlighted various examples to illustrate this. For example, in the last programming period, French regions had responsibility for EAFRD elements however, scope in this programming period is more limited in terms of types of interventions applied under the new French CAP Strategic Plan. Regions such as Nouvelle Aquitaine have a regional strategic plan, with regionalised measures and a regional Monitoring Committee to enable meaningful discussions with stakeholders and keep the link between territories and the national CSP. Members acknowledged the potential benefits of a mechanism for regions to feed into CSP revision procedures via regional CSP implementation that is better connected with wider public policies at the regional level.

The role of the national Monitoring Committee and its connections with regions was also discussed. Members suggested that having good coordination and collaboration between regions is a way of ensuring that the obligations can be handled effectively. This could be an effective mechanism to ensure that regions are involved, represented, coordinated, and connected at the different levels in the implementation of the CAP Strategic Plan. It was suggested that Member States include a menu of interventions in the relevant CAP Strategic Plan, that enable regions to choose which measures they want to implement. Such a menu could be designed in collaboration with all regions under national guidelines with each intervention having a common national part and a regional matrix, in which each region develops, within the normative and national framework, interventions according to its own specificities.



Members acknowledged the important role of national networks in helping to bring together all the different organisations supporting the implementation of CAP Strategic Plans, including the regional dimension. National networks could help Managing Authorities to harmonise the contribution of the regions for the writing of interventions, for the specificity of their territories and can clarify the views of national implementation across each region where it has responsibility for implementation.

The regional dimension of the CSP AKIS coordination body was also highlighted. Members noted that such bodies risked being fragmented and unconnected with regional/local actors. It was acknowledged that the current plans of Member States consider only one national body with no regional division, so members suggested that regional AKIS options could help reflect differences in geography, climate, society, economy, culture etc.

Advisory services have a vital role to play. In supporting the needs of the farmers and other rural actors they also need to connect with the regions as well as the relevant EIP partners and Innovation Support Services.

AKIS national coordination bodies can also play a very important role in collecting the needs and connecting the institutions at the local, regional, and national level levels to support the key resilience needs of rural Europe.

Members also stressed the importance of coherence between policies and their implementation at different levels. EU regional climate plans were cited as an example with members querying the role of the regions in the governance of CSP to ensure that the CSP at the regional level is effectively supporting such policy outcomes.

3. Monitoring Committees

Members reflected on the mobilisation of an effective Monitoring Committee for CAP Strategic Plans.

Members reinforced the need for Monitoring Committees to have real purpose, suggesting that it is essential that there is recognition on the part of government that the Monitoring Committee is a partner, who is there to work alongside the Managing Authority and be the vehicle for ensuring that the CSP is implemented appropriately. Members also suggested there should be significant opportunities for the Monitoring Committee to play a much greater role in the evaluation of the CSP. For example, oversight of progress towards the result and impact indicators which Member States commit to in CSPs. Members suggested that mechanisms be in



place to transparently report on this progress, both nationally and at the EU level with the Commission providing a clearer EU-wide mapping between national measures and these indicators.

Members considered the operational aspects of Monitoring Committees, citing advance preparations for, and timings of any meeting as essential.

Preparation of documents is crucial, with members allowed ample time to review, with clear deadlines for inputs. Whilst timings will vary, the key component here is ensuring that such processes are of value. For example:

- Documents setting out clearly what needs to be considered.
- Judging the level of information needed for a meeting on the detail required, including adopting a language that is tailored to the needs of members.
- Clear feedback loop, with transparency around how members have responded, e.g. example, track changes.
- Ensure organisations (e.g. NGOs) have the capacity to contribute timely and effectively.

At this stage of CSP implementation (as of Summer 2023) many Member States are working on amendments to CSP. Members considered when the right time was to involve the Monitoring Committee, before or after amendments have been submitted to the European Commission? Members felt that Managing Authorities should involve Monitoring Committees well before any formal engagement with the European Commission. Managing Authorities should use the national network to help the Monitoring Committee to gather inputs and make everybody aware of what is intended to be submitted to the European Commission.

There were some reflections on the fact that not everybody needs to agree on everything that is discussed at a Monitoring Committee meeting. Indeed, members suggested that it may be that it is useful for Monitoring Committees to work with national networks to bring a wider set of stakeholders together in a more informal setting to enable discussions on aspects of CSP implementation.

Members themselves should embrace opportunities for issues to be discussed in more detail between Monitoring Committee meetings if that enables a more efficient running of the Monitoring Committee meeting itself.



In terms of size, members recognise there is no set way of establishing the size of a Monitoring Committee. Some Member States have expanded the size of their Monitoring Committee and explicitly included stakeholders with a particular interest in Pillar I. Some have taken the opportunity to expand membership to reflect the priorities of the CSP, e.g. forestry. Others have decreased the size of the Monitoring Committee (compared to previous programming period) to ensure that it remains focused on the needs of the CSP.

Irrespective of size, representation on Monitoring Committee will be key. For example, although environment/climate change is now a much higher priority for the CAP, members considered it possible for environmental organisations to be under-represented on such bodies. Members also felt it to be crucial that Member States ensure that the membership is established in an open, transparent way, for example, by utilising “Expression of Interest” process to become a member. Any process should also consider the spatial dimension as well as the thematic dimensions associated with membership whilst ensuring that the process of selection is publicly available.

Members felt that outputs from the Monitoring Committee should be made publicly available alongside all other aspects of the work of the Monitoring Committee including a list of members, the rules, procedures, and the opinions of the Monitoring Committee (as outlined in the code of conduct).

It was also accepted that there should be opportunities for regions to have their own regional Monitoring Committees to support and enhance CSP implementation. Members further suggested that Monitoring Committees (regional or national) should adopt a common approach and operate according to a set of minimum standards that are harmonised across the EU. Members agreed that the production of guidance to support the establishment and operation of Monitoring Committees (and their effective application) would be welcome.

Disclaimer

This paper has been developed with the involvement of members of the EU CAP Network Thematic Group on CSP towards implementation from several EU Member states as part of the work carried out by the CAP Implementation Contact Point during and between thematic group meetings. The information and views set out in this document do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the European Commission.

