

# EU CAP Network Subgroup on Innovation and Knowledge Exchange

REPORT  
1<sup>st</sup> Meeting

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## Welcome and introduction by DG AGRI

### Introduction by Hugo Almeida

Hugo Almeida, Deputy Head of Unit D1 'Rural areas and networks' opened the meeting and gave a formal welcome to the first meeting of the Subgroup on Innovation and Knowledge Exchange (SolKE). Besides, he brought an update on the latest relevant developments - you can find his presentation [here](#).

Firstly, he informed Subgroup members that the European CAP Network was launched on 6 October 2022 and that, from that date onwards, the SolKE had replaced the permanent Subgroup on Innovation for agricultural productivity and sustainability (hereafter SOI). The new governance bodies of the European CAP Network have not yet been officially established and their new members have not been appointed. Until then SolKE is thus in a transitional phase in which it will meet under the new name but still in the current composition.

Then he came back to the merger of the European Network for Rural Development, including its Evaluation part, and the EIP-AGRI Network into the European CAP Network, explaining that the objective of the single network is to bring together all stakeholders interested in sustainable agriculture, forestry and rural development to further boost cooperation and innovation across the EU. The European CAP Network launch event organised in Brussels was attended by more than 300 participants, consisting of all types of stakeholders from all over the EU. The event was built around interactive sessions and other activities, including the Rural Inspiration Awards 2022 Ceremony. Participants were also invited to join different workshops based on the 4 strands of the new network: Innovation and Knowledge Exchange, Implementation, Evaluation and Communication.

In the Innovation and Knowledge Exchange session discussions were based on the key question: 'How can we further strengthen networking for innovation and knowledge exchange in the future?'. Topics such as networking activities, cross-border cooperation and the gap between research and practice were addressed. Some recurring issues in the discussions concerned the need to demonstrate the added value of networking for innovation, to enhance the accessibility of projects' results in understandable language, and to organise a marketplace for cross-border cooperation and foster synchronized calls in Member States (MSs). Hugo Almeida presented also a new logo and website of the European CAP Network and informed the members about the publication of the first edition of the EU CAP Network newsletter on Innovation & Knowledge Exchange | EIP-AGRI, which is the successor of the newsletter on Agriculture and Innovation. Hugo Almeida invited SolKE members to subscribe also to the new general EU CAP Network newsletter that will be launched on 27 October and to follow network's new social media accounts on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube.

Then an update on CAP plan approval process was presented. Currently 9 CAP Strategic Plans (CAP SPs) have been officially approved. These are the ones from: Denmark, Ireland, Spain, France, Luxembourg, Austria, Poland, Portugal and Finland. In the coming weeks, more CAP SPs will be approved. Regarding AKIS-related aspects in CAP SPs, almost all discussions with MSs are closed: DG AGRI has held a big number of bilateral meetings which helped to increase among

MSs the understanding of why we need AKIS and how its functioning can be improved with CAP support. MSs planned an impressive number of OGs and consider these projects to be part of the solution for agricultural and rural challenges: planned OGs will be focusing on varied topics such as short supply chains, biodiversity, testing eco-schemes, climate commitments, etc. OGs in the new CAP can cover any of the 9 Strategic Objectives. As the new CAP put emphasis on reinstalling support for advice and making advisors more visible it is good to see in CAP SPs how farmers are supported to take advice in a variety of ways, for instance by using knowledge vouchers. Researchers are also more involved in many actions within CAP SPs e.g., through knowledge hubs, demonstration projects, etc. All 27 CAP SPs will soon become available on the EC's website.

Finally, Hugo Almeida informed Subgroup members that there are currently 2606 OGs registered to System for Fund Management in the European Union (SFC), their number increased by 182 since the Subgroup meeting last June.

## Introduction by Orsolya Frizon Somogyi

Orsolya Frizon Somogyi, Deputy Head of Unit F2 'Research and Innovation' in DG AGRI presented an update on the latest developments in the Horizon Programme. You can find her presentation [here](#). Unit F2 has been participating in the Subgroup to ensure the link between the CAP and Horizon Europe, thus stimulating that results from research & innovation undertaken under Horizon Europe are being used by farmers.

Cluster 6 of the Work Programme (WP) for 2021-2022 is closed and projects from 2021 calls are launched. Some of these projects are very relevant for the Innovation strand of the EU CAP Network, such as the [EU-FarmBook](#), [modernAKIS](#) and [ATTRACTISS](#). The kick-off meeting of the EU-FarmBook project took place on 19 October. This project brings together Horizon multi-actor projects (MAP), and CAP EIP-AGRI OGs: good practices are collected and shared with advisors, farmers and other stakeholders. Thus, EU-FarmBook helps disseminating research and innovation solutions. ModernAKIS and ATTRACTISS focus on AKIS systems. Other Horizon projects relevant for the Innovation strand of the EU CAP Network are [Oper8](#), [CLIMED-FRUIT](#), [B-THENET](#), [BROILERNET](#) and [Grazeing4ArgoEcology](#), besides the Horizon Thematic Networks. These connections between the two EU funds are highly important.

The final version of Cluster 6 WP for 2023-2024 is being developed and the adoption and publication are foreseen for the end of November. Calls 2023 will be open for proposals immediately after publication. Cluster 6 Infodays will take place on 13 and 14 December, and Cluster 6 Brokerage event will be on 19 December. On 17-18 January 2023 there will be an EU CAP Network brokerage event on advisory networks. The content of the WP 2023-2024 hasn't changed since it was last presented in the SOI meeting last June.

Orsolya Frizon Somogyi then highlighted the new instrument in the WP 2023-2024: the co-fund partnerships. The call for partnerships can hopefully be launched in January 2023. Unit F2 is responsible for 2 co-fund partnerships: on agro-ecology and animal health. Unit F2 is also co-

responsible, together with DG RTD, for the European Partnership of Agriculture of Data. These partnerships are co-funded by MSs and a significant budget has been allocated to them.

The new geo-political situation and policy priorities following the Russian invasion of Ukraine have had an impact on the Cluster 6 WP 2023-2024. Within this context, there were two Communications by the EC - 'REPowerEU' and 'Safeguarding food security and reinforcing the resilience of food systems', and a factsheet on '[Safeguarding food security and reinforcing the resilience of food systems](#)' which presents relevant examples from research & innovation and was published during R&I days in September. The EC is now working on a new Communication - "Ensuring availability and affordability of fertilisers", with a possible adoption on 9 November. The Horizon Programme can also help tackling emerging issues, it is important to bear it in mind in the next programming exercises.

Another instrument that is high on the political agenda is the EU Horizon Mission 'Soil Deal for Europe'. This instrument is a major initiative with an important budget, and it has its own WP under Horizon Europe. The WP 2022 closed for applications at the end of September and 78 proposals were received, the evaluation of the applications is ongoing. The WP 2023 is expected to be adopted by the end of November and the call is expected to open in January - it will be open until September, longer than the other Cluster 6 calls. The yearly World Soil Day takes place on 5 December and the EC will hold several related events. Orsolya Frizon Somogyi finalised by inviting SolKE members to join the EC and hold events and promote the Soil Mission as well.

## Session I: Role and tasks of the Subgroup on Innovation and Knowledge Exchange (SolKE)

### Introduction by Tatjana Borbas (DG AGRI)

Tatjana Borbas, Project Manager in Unit D1 'Rural areas and networks' in DG AGRI, presented the overall governance structure of the European CAP network. You can find her presentation [here](#). The structure is basically the same as before, consisting of the Assembly, the Steering Group and the permanent Subgroups. This governance structure remains the same as before since it has worked well according to the feedback received from the members of those governance bodies and the National Rural Networks.

The role of the Assembly mostly remains the same, except for the coordination between thematic strands (Evaluation, Implementation and Innovation & Knowledge exchange) of the European CAP network which is a new task for the Assembly. The Assembly serves as the overarching governance body and will provide the strategic framework and guidance for the activities of the European CAP Network. Different types of stakeholders will be members of the Assembly: national CAP Networks, CAP Strategic Plans national managing authorities and paying agencies, LEADER local action groups, research institutes, farm advisory services, NGOs members of the civil dialogue groups on the CAP and organisations representing regional or local authorities. Some members will be nominated by the MSs, some by a public call (e.g., representatives of regional or local authorities) and some by civil dialogue groups on the CAP (e.g., representatives of NGOs).

The new framework for the civil dialogue groups has been adopted recently and the public call for membership of these groups is being prepared. Then, the organisations that will be part of the new civil dialogue groups will be asked if they are interested in becoming members of the Assembly.

The Steering Group will be smaller and have a more operational role in the new set up. Its role will be to coordinate the thematic strands and assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the activities of the European CAP Network. The Steering Group will report to the Assembly. The members will be representatives from different levels of the governance bodies to ensure a good flow of information between all the working strands of the EU CAP Network: there will be 8 members from the Assembly, 4 members from each of the permanent Subgroups and 2 members from the expert group on the implementation of the CAP SP Regulation related to monitoring and evaluation. It will be ensured that the geographic and thematic diversity of its members will reflect those of the members of the European CAP Network. The membership is on a voluntary basis, and DG AGRI hopes that this will ensure commitment and active participation from the members.

A critic received on the former governance setting was that there was overlap in topics and exchanges in the Assembly level and Steering level. This will no longer be the case and DG AGRI asks that the SOIKE members in the Steering Group will share information between the two governance bodies.

Subgroups will carry out thematic activities and those that will remain from the former governance are the SOI, now SOIKE, and the one on LEADER: everyone considered that these Subgroups were very useful and wanted them to continue. There will be a new Subgroup, which is the one on CAP Strategic Plans.

Tatjana Borbas then presented the planning for setting up the new governance in 2022 and first quarter of 2023. Until the new governance is settled, there is a provision in the Implementation Decision that allows the members of the former governance structure to continue until the membership is updated and the new members of the governance bodies are appointed.

MSs will be invited to nominate their permanent representatives in the Assembly in the last quarter of 2022. Organisations from Civil Dialogue Groups will be asked to express interest if they wish to become members of the Assembly. DG AGRI will also organise a public call for organisations representing regional and local authorities. Some categories of members will be appointed at a later stage (e.g., not all LEADER local action groups will be selected at the beginning of 2023 in all MSs, not all National CAP Networks will be in place yet, etc.) but current members can continue until the membership is updated. DG AGRI is expecting that the first meeting of the EU CAP Network Assembly will take place in the first quarter of 2023. The new Assembly is then asked to nominate their representatives in the Steering Group and agree on the permanent Subgroups (composition, mandate and role). Still in the first quarter of 2023, Assembly members will nominate their representatives in the permanent Subgroups, and the first meetings of these new bodies are foreseen for the first or second quarter of 2023. The first meeting of the new Steering Group is planned to take place in the second quarter of 2023.

The presentation was followed by a Q&A session:

- **Q:** Will there be a call in Q4 2022 for the membership in permanent subgroups?
- **A:** In 2022 and 2023 the Assembly membership will be set up. Then, the Assembly members will appoint representatives for the Subgroups from their respective organisations. This will happen in 2023, because the Assembly will firstly need to be set up.
- **Q:** MSs must appoint their members in governance bodies. As current members, would we be informed about the procedure, so we could "re-apply"?
- **A:** It will depend how the MSs will internally organise it. The EC will launch a call and invite the administrations in MSs to appoint different categories of representatives. How MSs will organise this process internally is up to them: they will see what is the best fit, if people should continue in their role or not.
- **Q:** Could the policy desk of the Committee of the Regions be a technical member of the Assembly? This would be useful. Or the NAT commission for instance?
- **A:** There will be a public call for organisations representing regional and local authorities and a call for NGOs to become a member of the Civil Dialogue Groups. These Civil Dialogue Groups can propose members for the Assembly.
- **Q:** How does DG AGRI contact the MSs to propose members for the Assembly? Do you send a letter? Who would be your contact in the MSs?
- **A:** The letter will be addressed to the permanent representations of each MS in Brussels. The permanent representations know where to circulate the invitation internally in their country and will get the information back.

After the Q&A session, a discussion was organised in plenary, based on four questions:

### **Q1: What especially interests you in the work of the SOI / SolKE?**

Main points highlighted by participants:

- Link between the CAP and Horizon programme – we can further foster the link between Horizon Europe projects and relevant OGs. The results of the Horizon projects and of OGs need to be better disseminated internally in MSs.  
The interactive exchange between innovation and agricultural is very important. There are many interesting and diverse OGs. We need to bring it to the next level and build the bridge with research projects. It is good to have speakers from the regions, to learn from their experience and use it across borders.
- Opportunities for participation and interaction – as a member of the Subgroup, it is very interesting to be able to bring up new ideas and develop them through different networking events and with different groups. These interactions are very fruitful. Learning from others and exploring what the real problems in practice are, is very valuable: we need to safeguard this.



**Q2: Which other items would you like to see on the Subgroup's agenda in the future, bearing in mind the broader scope of SolKE?**

Topics / issues that Subgroup members mentioned:

- Real challenges and possibilities for farmers and forest owners – there is a need to concentrate more on them. The approach was good when the SOI started, but this was a bit lost along the years. With the SolKE, we can try again to focus on what the real problems in practice are.
- The scope of the SolKE could have a stronger relation to the new roles of advisors. New methods of advisory work will be developed in the future: we need to share the info on best practices, disseminating it to advisors, while also connecting to other stakeholders in the SolKE.
- Social innovation should be more emphasised. Innovations in rural areas need to be shared broadly, because they are connected to the broader functionality of rural areas. Innovation in production or other technical issues needs to be connected to social innovation, as agriculture needs a well-functioning rural area. In many regions, rural areas are maintaining agriculture, instead of the other way around. SolKE should look at both sides at the same time: how they support each other in different geographical regions and in cultural contexts.
- In a previous Subgroup meeting at beginning of the year, we collected the priorities for networking activities and many of the points then selected are still very relevant. It's important to have the exchange on innovations but also to see how innovation can support immediate challenges, like the war in Ukraine, energy crisis, climate change, etc. The Subgroup needs to focus on what is happening now and not only in the future.
- EIP-AGRI Practice abstracts and their accessibility and usefulness: the Subgroup could have a reflection on this and discuss how could we further disseminate them in a user-friendly format, at national level.

**Q3: How different categories of members could contribute more to the SolKE?**

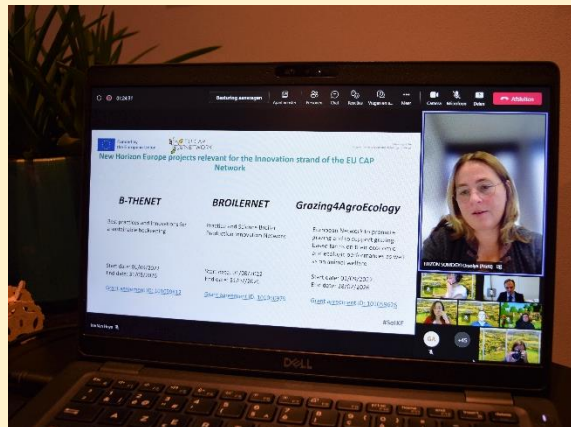
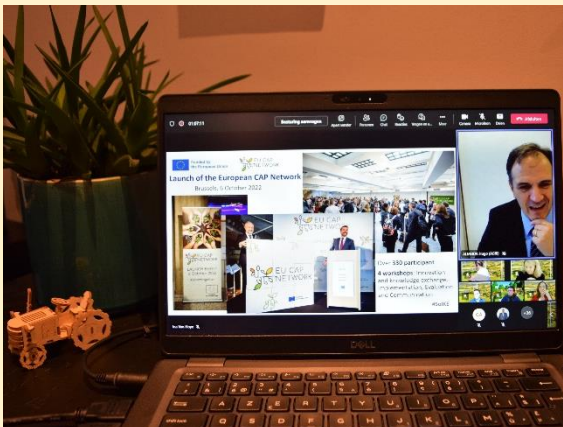
Suggestions presented by Subgroup members:

- Further promote cooperation with Subgroup members in the preparation of Subgroup meetings. For example, with COPA-COGECA: its different groups can assist in the preparation of supporting documents prior to the meeting.
- A way for SolKE members to contribute more could be through online surveys and timely shared background documents prior to the meetings, so these can be shared with colleagues in the organisation or in their networks - participants can then be better prepared for the meeting and bring other valuable inputs.
- Another suggestion could be to invite to the meetings or to integrate in SolKE representatives from other sectors (e.g., technology related) because agriculture is a business that cooperates with other sectors. It would be relevant for a stronger cooperation.

**Q4: Are there any organisations active in the field of agriculture and rural development at Union level absent in SOI that should be included in SoIKE?**

Participants proposed:

- Commission for Natural Resources of the European Committee of the Regions
- Other types of advisory organisations besides those involved in the innovation support
- Networks of advisors such as EUFRAS, International Academy of Rural Advisors (IALB), South-eastern Europe Advisory Service Network (SEASN)
- Confederation of European Forest Owners (CEPF), because forest sector as part of rural development is high in EU level discussions





## Session II: Networking activities on innovation and knowledge exchange

### Presentation of networking activities for 2022 and 2023

This session included four presentations, as well as Q&A sessions.

**Pacôme Elouna Eyenga**, team leader of the Support Facility for Innovation and Knowledge exchange including EIP-AGRI (EIP-AGRI SF), presented the Annual Work Programme (AWP) for 2022-2023. You can see his presentation [here](#). This AWP has been prepared taking into account the discussions on future networking priorities from the last SOI meeting.

*Priority 1* refers to the further implementation of the EIP-AGRI, but it also concerns the setting up of the new EU CAP Network. This includes the preparation and facilitation of the EU CAP Network launch event, the collaboration with the three other Support Facilities ensuring a good coordination of activities, as well as the organisation and facilitation of meetings of the governance bodies of the EU CAP Network, specifically SOIKE. EIP-AGRI SF will also work to further consolidate the EIP-AGRI implementation, organise cross-visits and support key stakeholders in MSs in meeting their needs (e.g., in designing calls and events).

*Priority 2* concerns bridging the CAP and Horizon Europe, one of the core businesses of EIP-AGRI SF. With its AWP, EIP-AGRI SF is addressing all CAP Specific Objectives as well as 5 priority areas for research and innovation as set out in Horizon Europe.

Under *Subpriority 2.1*, on the efficient resource management, two events are being prepared: a workshop on food security (first half of 2023) and a seminar on the current situation with the high energy and fertilizer prices (by the end of 2022). There is also a new Focus Group on recovery of abandoned agricultural lands. Regarding *Subpriority 2.2* - making animals and plants healthier, two other events are planned, a workshop on animal welfare (first half of 2023), and another workshop on the sustainable use of pesticides (also in the first half of 2023). For *Subpriority 2.3* - adopting ecological approaches from farm to landscape levels, there is a new FG on enhancing biodiversity through high diversity landscape features. In respect to *Subpriority 2.4* - opening new avenues for rural growth, a workshop on young entrepreneurs is being prepared (second half of 2022). Additionally, a new FG will be dealing with social farming and innovations.

*Priority 3* focuses on AKIS and the 5<sup>th</sup> research and innovation priority, so it is a specific priority as it bridges the research policy and the CAP.

In respect to *Subpriority 3.1*. - Supporting a well-functioning AKIS and fostering a thriving agricultural and forestry innovation ecosystem including the uptake of digitalization, a seminar on AKIS is will be prepared as a capacity-building event, however the scope of the seminar is still being discussed and it might change. Additionally, there will be a brokerage event to support the Horizon Europe Call for Advisory networks. Further, the uptake of digitalisation will continue to be supported through the current EIP-AGRI website, as long as it will be operational. Digitalisation is a cross-cutting theme to all networking activities of the EIP-AGRI Support Facility. *Subpriority 3.2*. refers to thematic, transnational and cross-border networking of innovative projects. There are two

main activities to refer to: the project portfolio analysis and the organisation of cross visits. Brokerage activities also contribute to this priority.

Pacôme Elouna Eyenga presented then the tentative calendar of networking activities for the period July 2022 - June 2023.

The presentation was followed by a Q&A session:

- **Q:** In order to engage in cross-visits, should MSs or national CAP networks reserve budget for the travel of participants? What are the possible financial instruments in case this needs to be done?
- **A:** For cross-visits, DG AGRI and the EIP-AGRI SF will organise and cover the travel and accommodation costs of a certain number of participants. In principle, farmers, advisors and researchers will be considered key participants.

**Willemine Brinkman**, deputy team leader of the EIP-AGRI SF, presented an update on the ongoing Focus Groups (FG), as well as on the preparation of the new FGs. You can find her presentation [here](#). On the current FGs, their reports and factsheets have been published and can be found on their webpages. Their field visits were also illustrated in the videos that were presented right before the start of this SolKE meeting. The next three FGs will have their first meetings in January-February 2023. The call for applications for FGs members ended on 19 September 2022. The next steps will be to select the FG members and inform applicants: DG AGRI will inform applicants if they are selected, and they must confirm their interest in becoming a FG member. These FGs will be finished with the publication of a final report in June 2023.

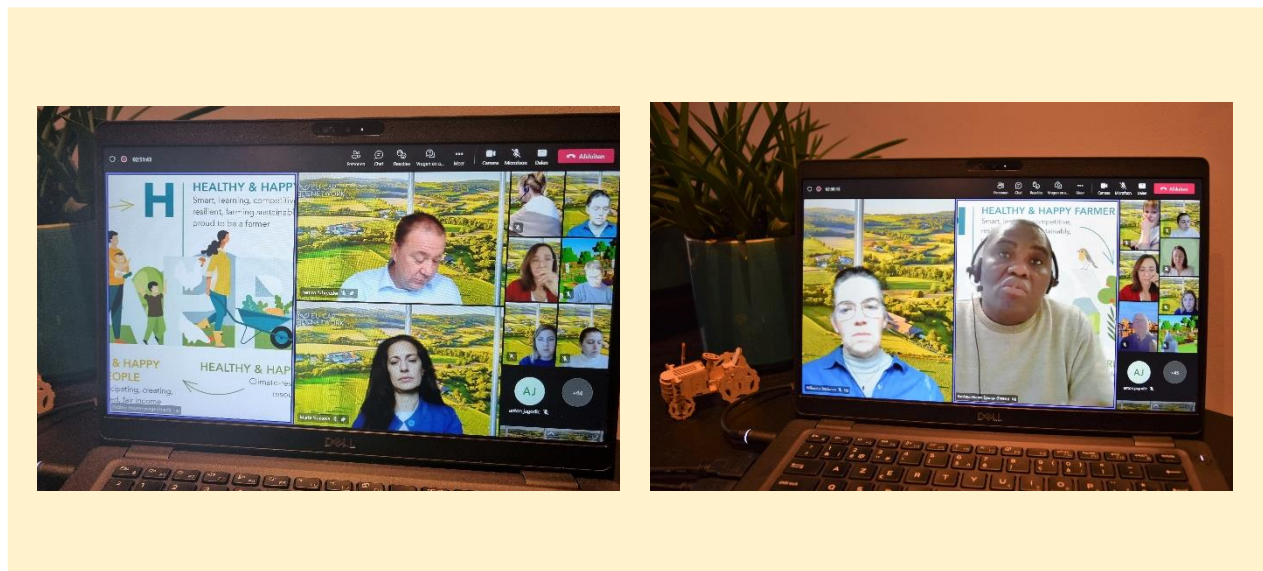
**Marta Yonkova (EIP-AGRI Support Facility)** presented an update on the workshop 'Young entrepreneurs - engines of innovation in rural areas'. You can find her presentation [here](#). This event will take place in Dublin, Ireland on November 30<sup>th</sup> and December 1<sup>st</sup> this year. The call for participation was open between 4<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> of October and there were 192 applications which were being evaluated. The workshop will include field visits as there are many interesting examples of entrepreneurship and incubators for startups in Ireland. Topics to be addressed during the workshop include innovative approaches to boost entrepreneurship, business plans for applying innovative ideas, challenges in implementing these innovative business ideas, and needs of young entrepreneurs and start-ups.

**Remco Schreuder (EIP-AGRI Support Facility)** presented an update on the preparation of the seminar 'Smart circular farming to address high energy and fertiliser prices'. You can find his presentation [here](#). This is an upcoming seminar scheduled to take place in Porto, Portugal on December 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> this year. The seminar will focus on finding innovative solutions for resilient farming and food systems through smart agriculture and economic approaches. The focus is on energy and fertilizers which seem to have the largest impacts on the stability of food systems. The aim of the event is to find innovative solutions to cope with the changes in accessibility and affordability of energy and fertilizers, therefore looking at resilient farming as key to safeguard food security and climate objectives. Knowledge exchange is the main objective of the event, with

special attention to self-efficiency and resource efficiency, as well as to the challenges and needs from practice. A field visit is also included. The event is followed up by a brokerage event in the afternoon of December 7<sup>th</sup> which will be a 'project and idea market' with many more opportunities for interactions and exchanges among participants, hopefully leading to acceleration of the uptake of best innovative practices. The target groups of the event are farmers, advisers, researchers in circular economy, energy specialists, NGOs. The call is open from October 14<sup>th</sup> until October 24<sup>th</sup>.

These three presentations were followed by a Q&A session:

- **Q:** When do you plan to select the members for the new Focus Groups?
- **A:** The selection was ongoing and was to be completed in the following week, by the beginning of November applicants should be informed if they had been selected or not.
- **Q:** Will there be networking activities involving OGs and other types of projects, from EU and national levels?
- **A:** This is already being done in the workshops and seminars that the EIP-AGRI Support Facility organises, namely through open calls for participation - representatives of different types of innovative projects should apply for events. All the planned thematic events will involve different types of projects. Regarding the cross visits, these will mainly focus on OGs but maybe there could be space to extend to other types of projects.



## Session III: Shaping networking activities on innovation and knowledge exchange for 2023

The third session was dedicated to further shaping the upcoming networking activities for 2023. Subgroup members were invited to join four breakout groups in two rounds: firstly, existing rough ideas for each of these events were presented and then a group discussion was facilitated to collect suggestions on the scope, objectives and potential participants. At the end of the breakouts, the main highlights from group discussion were presented in plenary.

Main highlights presented in plenary from discussion groups on the four upcoming events:

**Workshop on food security** – Subgroup members agreed that the focus on climate change is relevant, the scope is well defined and the focus on climate change well addressed. It was also suggested to address food security at farm level, and to focus on Operational Groups addressing food security. It was highlighted that focusing on solutions is very important, and not only on problems. Participants agreed that the workshop objectives are well defined, but still it was suggested to add a few other issues, such as short supply chains.

**Workshop on the sustainable use of pesticides** - one of the suggestions was that the event should also tackle climate change and related issues such as pests and diseases that are appearing. Additionally, there should be a focus on the whole value chain, as well as a holistic approach considering not only production, but also food security and looking at the side effects along the value chain. Advisors need to be included in discussions, as they need to adapt their work and provide good practices to farmers to achieve a more sustainable use of pesticides. Additionally, digital solutions should be considered too. Finally, it was highlighted that it is relevant to learn from organic farming and from integrated pest management solutions.

**Workshop on animal welfare** – participants highlighted that there is a need for sharing good practices within this context, exchanging experiences and knowledge. The proposed topics - end of the cage age, monitoring animal welfare, and societal demands for animal welfare – were considered relevant, while other topics were proposed. It was mentioned that the involvement of advisors in supporting changes in farming systems is important to consider, as well as to have a view on the whole value chain and on the impact of animal welfare on the business component of farming.

**Seminar on AKIS** - the seminar could start with a session where different types of AKISs and governance models are presented and discussed. The role of the national CAP networks in supporting AKIS is also an important issue to have in the agenda. Advisors, innovation hubs and the need for training them were also mentioned. The link between the CAP and Horizon Programme was highlighted as something that would be relevant to tackle too. Participants pointed out that social innovation needs to be better addressed within AKIS. It was also proposed to take the opportunity to discuss and improve the understanding of what constitutes a good functioning AKIS, and what are the indicators. It was also highlighted that the seminar should be oriented to operational and practical aspects of the implementation of CAP Strategic Plans within the context of AKIS.

For a more complete information on the points discussed in breakouts, you can check [Annex 1](#).

## Session IV: Green and digital transition in agriculture – Main findings from the JRC science for policy report ‘Towards a green and digital future’

**Kathrine Jensen and Carolina Puerta Pinero** from the EC’s Joint Research Center (JRC) presented the policy report ‘Towards a green and digital future’. You can find their presentation [here](#).

Kathrine Jensen started by presenting the framework and methodology used for the report: it feeds into the European Commission’s overall work on strategic foresight using collaborative methods to bring together experts from a wide range of fields and doing collective intelligence building exercises to discuss trends and signals of change for the future. Strategic foresight reports are used to help the EC and policy makers understand what we will face in the future. This report looks at how the digital transition and the green transition reinforce each other as they are at the top of the EU policy-making agenda. Therefore, it is important to make sure the two transitions can build on each other. Although the report looks at how the two transitions interact in 5 of the most polluting sectors, the presentation focused solely on agriculture. The report focuses on digital technologies, looking at how these can help sectors become greener. One of the conclusions of the report was that digital tools are only part of the solution: there are contextual factors (economy, politics, society) that determine the take-up and roll-out of such technologies.

Carolina Puerta Pinero presented then a short summary of the main results in the report that refer to the agriculture sector. Green and digital transitions can help the evolution towards a more sustainable system. For instance, digital functions help track and monitor information about the agricultural sector and environment, they support precision farming, enable decision-making in real time, systems management allows to bring together different types of information to improve the quality of decision-making, communication technologies can also be used (e.g. in supply chain tracking). The report presents two case studies used to illustrate the role of digital technologies in agriculture. The first one relates to the role of digital technologies in governance, while the second focuses on how to empower farmers not only to be responsible for sharing but also for receiving information. There are several important enabling factors that support the green and digital transitions in agriculture. These include several factors such as, for instance, increased trust in digital tools and data protection, value chain profitability and collaborative business models, digital infrastructures, digital skills and IoT services, interoperability of procedures.

This presentation was followed by a Q&A session:

- Q: How could we facilitate that the EDIH - European Digital Innovation Hubs connect with the SMART Agrihubs (currently not automatically linked)?
- A: This is a great reflection, already stated in the report not only in the technical part but also in the communication part.



## AOB & News from the Subgroup members

During this session, members of the Subgroup were invited to freely share novelties, experiences, etc. from their organisations and MSs. This is a summary of their contribution:

Karin Ellermann-Kügler (German Agricultural Advisory Service) explained that the 6<sup>th</sup> annual German OG meeting was held in Hannover, in September. It was a live 2,5- day event with 120 participants. The event consisted of small workshops and interesting presentations (focusing on relevant issues such as AKIS, or projects such as I2Connect and modernAKIS). The programme also included reporting on several OGs by enthusiastic young researchers and farmers. Lastly, there was an interesting presentation from the National Contact Point for Horizon Europe Cluster 6, which was particularly relevant for representatives from OGs who didn't know much about the opportunities in Horizon Europe. The workshops were quite practical: for instance, demonstrating how to use social media or to make short videos for project communication, or talking about administrative issues on how to apply for funding. Guests from outside of Germany also gave interesting perspectives. More information on this event is available [here](#) and the link to the German OGs database [here](#).

Karin also explained that the German Ministry of Agriculture will organise a hybrid event on rural areas and climate protection or climate adaptation, that will take place 25-26 January 2023. More information available [here](#).

Krzysztof Janiak (Polish National Rural Network) referred to the [European Rural Parliament event](#) that took place in September, in Poland. It was a 4-day event organised by ECRA, ELARD and the National Rural Network. The event included many field visits and was attended by around 350 participants from nearly 40 European countries.

Krzysztof Janiak also talked about the Polish OGs: there are 88 projects registered in SFC but, in reality, there are about 300 Polish OGs. Information on the OGs in Polish is available [here](#) (the Polish NRN is working on an English version).

Anton Jagodic (Slovenian Agricultural Advisory Service) explained that the Slovenian annual meeting for the public advisory service will take place on 28-29 November. Around 300-400 people are invited: farmers, researchers, advisors, policy makers, etc. On the second day of the meeting, 11 OGs will present their projects aiming at inspiring participants to start with new OGs, particularly the advisors and farmers.

Maria São Luis Centeno (Portuguese National Rural Network) talked about the [National Agroinnovation Summit 2022](#) that took place in Portugal, on 11-12 October 2022. It was a 2-day big event where all the Portuguese OGs met up and their results as well as those from other innovative projects were presented, it also included field visits. The summit also included a tech demonstration: several companies and start-ups were invited to show the potential of virtual and augmented reality in the agriculture field via a competition between universities from all over the country, to develop technological solutions for farmers. It was a very successful event as one of the aims was to promote links between farmers, tech students from universities and tech companies and, according to the feedback received, they want to continue to collaborate.

## Next steps and closing

Hugo Almeida (DG AGRI) thanked the members of the SolKE for their participation and lively discussions. He said that it had been inspiring to see what SolKE members do in their Member States. He acknowledged the interesting results from discussions, which will be taken into consideration and analyzed by DG Agri. The current AWP has already taken into account many points discussed in the meeting, therefore the current plan for activities is in line with expectations. Another point that was highlighted was that the interaction and questions in Session I of the meeting will be useful to further shape the future composition of the Subgroup and its working dynamics. Finally, Hugo Almeida thanked the EIP-AGRI Support Facility and colleagues from DG AGRI for the organization of the meeting, and informed that the next one will take place in February 2023, still with the current members' composition.

[The agenda of the meeting and all presentations can be found online.](#)

## Annex 1

### Breakout room 1 – Workshop on food security

At the start of the session, some initial rough ideas were presented by Xurxo Loureiro (SF) to kick-off the discussion.

The working title for the workshop is 'Strengthening farm resilience facing climate change' and it has been proposed to aim at complementing and building on the outcomes of another networking event that will take place in December - the [EU CAP Network Seminar on 'Smart circular farming to address high energy and fertiliser prices'](#), which will look for innovative solutions for resilient farming through smart circular economy approaches at farm and local level, in face of the current crisis that underlines the urgency of efficient and sustainable use of energy and fertilisers.

Within the same context, the proposal now is that the workshop on food security will look for knowledge and innovative solutions to strengthen farm resilience facing climate change effects. Therefore, the suggested objectives would be:

- Exchange knowledge on successful practices, opportunities, and tools relevant for adapting farming to climate change impacts and increase resilience on the short and long term.
- Identify challenges and explore potential solutions for dealing with climate change impacts, considering the preservation of good state of natural resources (water, soil) and biodiversity.
- Identify needs from practice and possible knowledge gaps that may be addressed by research.
- Promote networking among EIP-AGRI Operational Groups / other innovative projects, Horizon Europe multi-actor research projects, and relevant stakeholders.

Participants were invited to discuss on the proposed scope and objectives of the workshop, as well as to indicate organisations or experts that would be relevant to invite to participate in the event.

Regarding the scope, there was some divide between the two groups of participants who joined the breakout. One group suggested that the topic of the workshop should be broadened to have a more strategic level and that the results of the upcoming [OECD COP27 Virtual Pavilion](#) should be taken in consideration, while a discussion on policy needs for food supply should be included. But then the other group of participants considered that the proposed scope of the workshop is well-defined. Nevertheless, all participants indicated that focusing on climate change is very important.

Other considerations included reflections on the role of the CAP in balancing and harmonising climate change and food security policies, and that innovation plays a major role in this context and so the focus should be on Operational Group projects working on related topics. It was suggested to take current developments on EU plant protein production into consideration, as relevant for climate change and food security.

Additionally, some questions arose such as: How to address food security at farm level? How can Operational Groups work on this topic?

Regarding the proposed objectives for the workshop, participants considered that they are well-defined. Nevertheless, it was suggested to add a few other points: the identification of relevant EU policies, the particular reference to short supply chains, and a focus on food dependency vs independency, exports and imports.

It was highlighted that focusing on challenges and solutions is very important, and it was suggested to present the farming potential and opportunities in all countries, as well as to consider having as part of the outputs from the workshop, a summary (or an infographic) of best practices for Member States (MS).

An additional point that was highlighted was that it would be important to continue the discussion after the workshop at MS level, facilitated by the NRNs.

Regarding potential participants, several members indicated that they will send suggestions and information about relevant projects at a later stage. One concrete suggestion was the Maastricht University.

## **Breakout room 2 - Workshop on the sustainable use of pesticides**

At the start of the breakout session, some rough ideas were presented to kick-off the discussion. These included the proposal to focus the workshop on reducing chemical pesticides in arable crops, considering that this type of crops grow in all Member States covering a large agricultural area, and that they are essential for food security including animal feed. Also considering that climate change is putting a strain on them. Due to their large growing area, reducing chemical pesticides can be economically beneficial, particularly considering the increasing prices of agricultural inputs. Therefore, the workshop could focus on practical plant protection measures that combine optimal yields and high quality, with low environmental and human health effects.

Participants discussed the proposed scope, highlighting that it is crucial to tackle the topic of the sustainable use of pesticides, and it was agreed that arable crops are relevant in all countries. Most participants agreed that the scope of the workshop goes in the right direction, though some suggested to further narrow it down.

There seems to be some ongoing discussions in some Member States such as Germany, regarding the new Regulation on the Sustainable Use of Plant Protection Products. Many different types of stakeholders are affected by the new measures; therefore, it is not only important to focus on farmers, but to have a broader look at the whole value chain. The reduction of pesticides use also affects administration in its daily business (e.g., with the new regulation, new controls will be necessary). In Germany, farmers seem to be concerned with the time it takes for the authorisation of new alternatives – sometimes the practice needs alternative compounds much faster than the time it takes for them to be authorized. Therefore, the focus of the workshop must be clearly stated, highlighting that policy issues are not part of its scope nor objectives, but that the aim is to tackle issues related to practice, supporting farmers, advisors, other relevant stakeholders, while promoting innovation and good practices to reduce pesticides.

Bringing up concrete examples from practice is very important - good practices and innovative ideas/solutions should be shared and exchanged between Member States and regions during the workshop.

A very relevant issue to be include in the workshop is the effect of climate change on plant health: new diseases and pests appear and, in many cases, it is not clear if and how they will affect plant health and plant protection. It was suggested to discuss future challenges that are related to the climate crisis – problems are different in the North from the South of Europe (e.g., warmer winters in the North, drier summers in the South), but they exist in all Member States and these changing weather conditions may demand a higher use of pesticides to ensure satisfactory yields. Then, the question is: what alternatives are there and how can farmers, advisors and other stakeholders react to these challenges, namely the conflicts arising from a higher pressure of plant pests and diseases while dealing with a simultaneous demand for lower pesticide use.

Participants also suggested to look at the side effects that are associated to a reduction of pesticide use, and to have a more holistic approach taking in consideration climate change, food security, availability of fertilisers (how plant health and plant protection is affected).

Taking in consideration organic farming in particular will be relevant as there are already many solutions and practices used as alternatives for chemical pesticides. Integrated Pest Management (IPM) approaches can also contribute to sustainable alternatives and solutions.

Finally, it was pointed out that the use of digital solutions should be considered as well.

In terms of relevant projects to take in consideration, it was generally mentioned that there are interesting Horizon projects and German OGs tackling related issues.

As for the target group for participation at the workshop, Subgroup members mentioned that the topic is not only a challenge for farmers but also for advisors: they also have to adapt to new regulations and have to acquire new knowledge. Therefore, farmers, farmers organisations and advisors should be participating. Other ideas included researchers, stakeholders along the value chain, industry, national and European authorities, developers of new technologies, etc.

### **Breakout room 3 - Workshop on animal welfare**

In break-out room 3, the three proposed topics for the event were: end of the cage age, monitoring animal welfare, and societal demands for animal welfare.

Subgroup members found that all three topics proposed for the animal welfare workshop were relevant and proposed additional topics: animal welfare during transportation, animal welfare indicators for monitoring the impact of policies and practices, the role of digital tools in monitoring and adding value for farmers, related financial aspects of implementing methods to enhance animal welfare, encouragement to farmers to implement good practices, communication with consumers, incorporation of animal welfare into sustainability labelling schemes and its influence on consumers demand, the effect of current crises on consumers demand.



It was mentioned that it is important to highlight the business part of animal welfare: how to face market values, prices and animal welfare, particularly now in the current crisis? What are the costs for farmers? What support do farmers need?

Additionally, the role of the advisors in supporting farmers who are changing their farming systems was highlighted.

It was mentioned that sharing good practices would be a good outcome of the workshop.

Participants in the breakout emphasized the importance of including a wide range of stakeholders in the workshop and finding good examples of innovation and good practices from different animal production sectors and from different farm sizes.

In respect to projects or other initiatives that may be relevant to take in consideration, SolKE members suggested [the EU Reference Centres for animal welfare](#) and a [study on CAP Measures and Instruments Promoting Animal Welfare and Reduction of Antimicrobials Use \(europa.eu\)](#) as possible sources of information. Among welfare projects, PPillow (<https://www.ppillow.eu/>) was mentioned, and a recent animal welfare webinar that took place online in cooperation with Estonian, Finnish and Latvian Rural Networks: [Network to Innovate: Animal Health and Welfare](#). It was also mentioned that the Support Facility for Evaluation has established a thematic working group which is shortlisting indicators to evaluate the impact of the agricultural policies on animal welfare.

## Breakout room 4 – Seminar on AKIS

Initial ideas for the scope of this event were presented in four main groups of issues to tackle:

- AKIS models in MSs - AKIS coordination bodies and their AKIS networks. The key stakeholders of AKIS, what is their role and interactions with other AKIS stakeholders, how can they support the AKIS coordination body;
- AKIS implementation in MSs - The interventions related to AKIS in CAP SPs; national knowledge reservoirs (“knowledge hubs”); tools and activities that are in place / being planned, how these reservoirs are connected to the EU level, role of NRNs/national CAP networks;
- New roles of advisors and integration of all advisors in AKIS - New obligations, innovation support (“innovation hubs”), regular training for advisors, broader scope for advice, other selection criteria for advisors, public/private advisors and increased inclusiveness of all advisors in the AKIS;
- Link between CAP Strategic Plans and Horizon Europe - National contact points, projects with specific focus on AKIS. How are Horizon NCPs being involved by CAP-related actors and vice-versa. How are researchers being involved in AKIS and what plans are there to further increase their engagement.

In general, participants indicated that the scope of the meeting is going in a good and clear direction, thus the rough ideas that were presented were considered a good starting point, thought

it was mentioned that it seemed too ambitious for 1,5-day event and that we should better focus on the really burning issues for MSs regarding AKIS.

Issues already proposed that were further highlighted during the breakout were:

**AKIS models** – have a view on different AKIS models in MSs and have a brief presentation at the beginning of the seminar showcasing some of the existing types (3-4 different models) and then discuss them in smaller groups. Add a point on AKIS models versus governance models in MS. E.g., for MSs that have regionalised governance structures such as Germany, how to formulate AKIS tools at federal level that address regional needs? How to address issues that are relevant for some regions but not for all of them (e.g., needs on training for advisors vary per region).

**AKIS implementation** – need to further elaborate on what is a good functioning AKIS, showing good practices and discussing them (e.g., use 'factsheets' to support deeper discussions). Share experiences on AKIS implementation plans (how to prepare them, how to make them work) and on the role of the CAP Networks (European and national) in supporting AKIS.

**Advisors and AKIS** – share experiences and discuss on innovation hubs and the support to advisors, the organisation of training for advisors (including building soft skills like networking) and on advisors operating at international scale.

The link between the CAP and HORIZON Europe was also highlighted as something that needs to be further elaborated and discussed.

Participants mentioned a few more points:

- Social innovation within the AKIS needs to be better stressed (e.g., innovation for more social equality and more quality of life in rural areas);
- The scaling up of experiences and good practices from Operational Groups needs further attention;
- AKIS evaluation and indicators to evaluate AKIS need to be discussed - how to evaluate AKIS from the agricultural perspective and also in view of other rural development aspects? How to evaluate throughout the whole programming period?

It was mentioned that, by the time of the seminar, some MSs will already be in the middle of the first implementation phases, while others will be less advanced, and so these MSs could profit from lessons already learned and have an exchange on that.

Overall, it will be relevant to share different scopes and views from MSs and so the seminar should be organised in view of operational and practical learning from first experiences on how to implement AKIS in practice – June will be a good moment to share experiences and discuss how to do this in practice, what do we face when we transform the plan into reality?

In respect to participants, it was suggested to consider implementing authorities of AKIS plans, CAP-evaluators from MSs, and also young entrepreneurs and researchers.