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9

Agrinnovation

Innovation, knowledge exchange and EIP-AGRI under the new EU CAP Network

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- Operational Groups update: More collaboration for innovation
- Young entrepreneurship for thriving rural areas



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Welcome

The EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) celebrated its 60th anniversary in 2022. The policy's original goals of increasing productivity, stabilising markets, bolstering farmer incomes and providing affordable, safe and high-quality food are still as relevant as ever.

In January 2023, the CAP for the 2023-2027 period came into force. It will lead the way towards more sustainable food systems and strengthen the efforts of European farmers to cope with climate change, preserve our environment and build resilient businesses. On 6 October 2022, the new European CAP Network was launched to support the implementation of the CAP and its national Strategic Plans.

This new network integrates the former European Network for Rural Development, including the Evaluation Helpdesk, and the European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural productivity and sustainability (EIP-AGRI) Network – joining forces for a more efficient exchange of information, boosting cooperation and innovation across EU agriculture and rural areas. The activities of the EU CAP Network will support key political priorities such as the Farm to Fork and Biodiversity Strategies, the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas and the Rural Pact.

The 'innovation, knowledge exchange and EIP-AGRI' strand of the EU CAP Network will connect farmers, foresters, researchers, advisors, businesses, educators, consumers and others to foster knowledge exchange, close the gap between research and practice, and boost the uptake of innovations across the EU.

This edition will illustrate what innovation, knowledge exchange and EIP-AGRI can offer you in the new EU CAP Network. I hope that these stories will inspire you to keep networking for sustainable innovation.



MIHAIL DUMITRU

Deputy Director-General

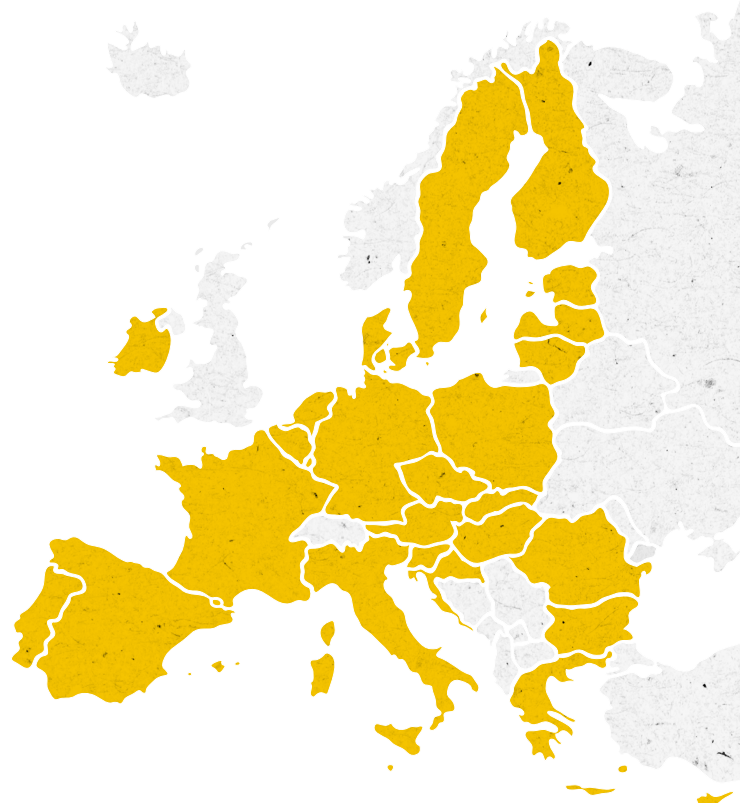
Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development, European Commission

Operational Groups update

New waves of EIP-AGRI Operational Groups across Europe

Since 2014, more than 2 700 **EIP-AGRI Operational Groups** projects have brought together farmers, researchers, advisors and others with complementary expertise to find practical solutions for challenges that farmers, foresters and rural communities are facing.

New Operational Groups are still being set up. Croatia, Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary are four examples of EU Member States that have launched their first Operational Groups in the last three years. Their efforts will bring more knowledge exchange and innovation to EU farming, forestry and rural communities. With the approval of the CAP Strategic Plans for 2023-2027, many more Operational Groups will be supported in the coming years.



2 700

EIP-AGRI Operational Groups' projects
(since 2014)

Developing local markets in northern Croatia

Croatian farmers have teamed up with IT advisors in an Operational Group to develop and market their products through direct sales. Products from different producers are sold from farm to fork in a local store in Zagreb, through a mobile store - for sales and delivery - and a webshop. Farmers see an increase in sales and production, and a growing customer base.



"By placing our products on the market together, we can offer customers from Zagreb and surrounding towns the best from our beautiful Zagorje region, while reducing costs. Branding and setting up a short supply chain takes time, but accessing the market together is excellent for developing our local area."

MLADEN CESAREC
Farmer and Project Coordinator

→ **More info in the Operational Groups database.**



Innovative feed for broilers and laying hens

A Bulgarian Operational Group is testing the benefits of insect-based feed for broilers and laying hens. The feed forms a source of proteins, fats and components with high anti-microbial capacity that stimulate the immune system. It could be a sustainable replacement for soy, improve the health of the animals and quality of their meat and eggs, and allow producers to reduce the use of antimicrobials.

→ [More information in the online database.](#)



Beehive monitoring and product innovation for the honey market

Romania is one of the EU's most important honey producers. An Operational Group is helping beekeepers track the productivity and health of their honeybees by installing sensors on the hives. Data on temperature, humidity, (nectar) weight and visited areas are sent directly to the beekeepers' smart-phones. The Operational Group is also designing new products and developing their own brand of processed quality honey in order to increase the market value of the honey products.

→ [More information in the online database.](#)



Protecting vineyards and orchards from spring frost

Due to climate change, spring frost is occurring more frequently. To help farmers prevent damage to their vineyards, orchards or horticultural crops, a Hungarian Operational Group is developing an environmentally friendly heating device, controlled by an intelligent weather station. The device is efficient, has a fast response time, is CO₂-neutral and does not require human intervention, thereby saving labour costs.



→ [More information in the online database.](#)

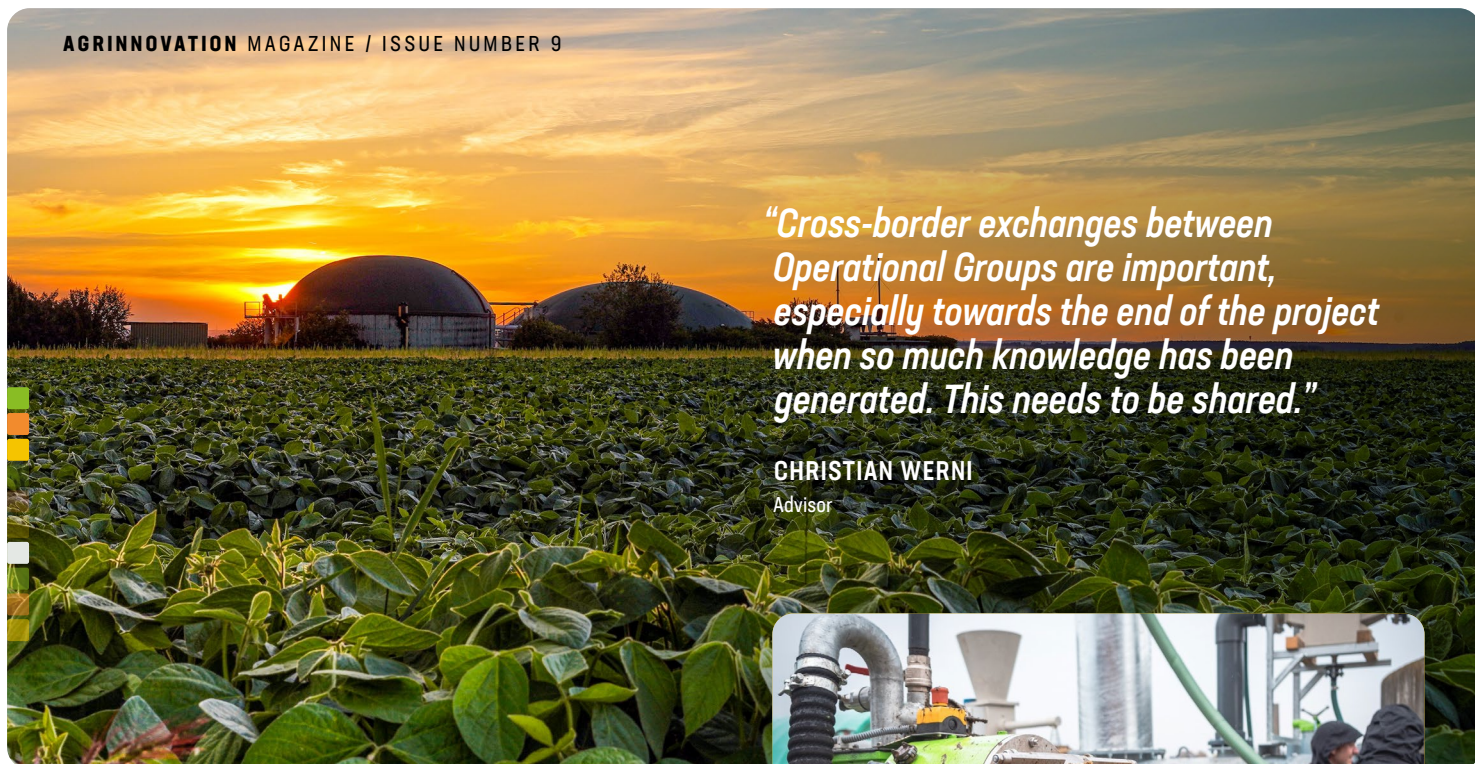
→ Browse all [Operational Groups in the online database.](#)

✓ Poland and Slovakia have recently launched new waves of Operational Groups. Greece will soon have its very first Operational Groups!

Did you know?

Each EU CAP Network Focus Group collects ideas for Operational Groups on key innovation areas, based on the needs of farmers, foresters and rural entrepreneurs.





“Cross-border exchanges between Operational Groups are important, especially towards the end of the project when so much knowledge has been generated. This needs to be shared.”

CHRISTIAN WERNI

Advisor



Boosting innovation across borders

When Operational Groups share results and good practices with other projects through national, cross-regional or cross-border collaboration, innovative solutions can spread more widely across European farms, fields and forests.

Exchanging views on nutrient management

In September 2022, Austrian advisors involved in the **Operational Group Ammosafe** visited the German region of Schleswig-Holstein to meet partners in the **ENEGÜLL Operational Group**. Both projects dealt with innovative nutrient management. Advisor Christian Werni looks back: “We exchanged experiences on agricultural innovation and interesting approaches for manure treatment. We visited farms with biogas plants, including an organic farm producing its own biogas heat. Cross-border exchanges between Operational Groups are important, especially towards the end of the project when so much knowledge has been generated. This needs to be shared.”



Operational Group cross-visits in the EU CAP Network

Starting in 2023, the EIP-AGRI Support Facility will be organising cross-visits between Operational Groups from different EU Member States.

→ **Keep an eye on the newsletter on innovation, knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI** to find out more.



Did you know?

- National Rural Networks from Portugal, Germany and Estonia have organised thematic events where Operational Groups could share ideas with other innovative European projects.
Read more in the EIP-AGRI AKIS brochure.
- The NEFERTITI Network has published **guidelines for organising successful cross-border farm demonstrations.**
- The new CAP supports cross-border collaboration between Operational Groups. Setting up an Operational Group with partners from different EU Member States is now possible.

Protecting crops from pests and weeds

Sustainable solutions for future farmers

Ensuring a stable and competitive crop yield with a lower use of pesticides is still a challenge for many EU farmers. Developing innovative alternatives and sharing good practices is essential to support the transition to more sustainable crop protection.

By 2030, the European Commission's **Regulation on the sustainable use of plant protection products** aims to lower the use of chemical pesticides by 50%. To help farmers reduce their reliance on chemical crop protection, French Operational Group RegGAE ('Biocontrol in arable crops through agroecology') has tested the effectiveness of natural enemies to control pests and weeds. The project has run trials on four farms in the Dijon region, including an agricultural college farm.

Project Coordinator Perrine Lair explains: "Ladybugs or parasitoid wasps can be very effective in tackling aphids or other pests. Mice and ground beetles can help regulate weeds by eating weed seeds. Farmers need measurable results, showing them how crop management can mobilise natural enemies, and how biocontrol can effectively contribute to better yields."

The Operational Group has developed guidelines and educational tools for farmers, advisors, teachers and agricultural students. Perrine concludes:

"If we want to encourage future farmers to adopt sustainable but more complex practices, it's important to show the benefits through on-farm demonstration, training and education across France."



- Find more details in the **Operational Groups database** or the **project video**.
- Get more inspiration on the event page of the **EU CAP Network workshop entitled 'Innovative arable crop protection - using pesticides sustainably'** or **the dedicated spotlight page**.





A new network to support the CAP

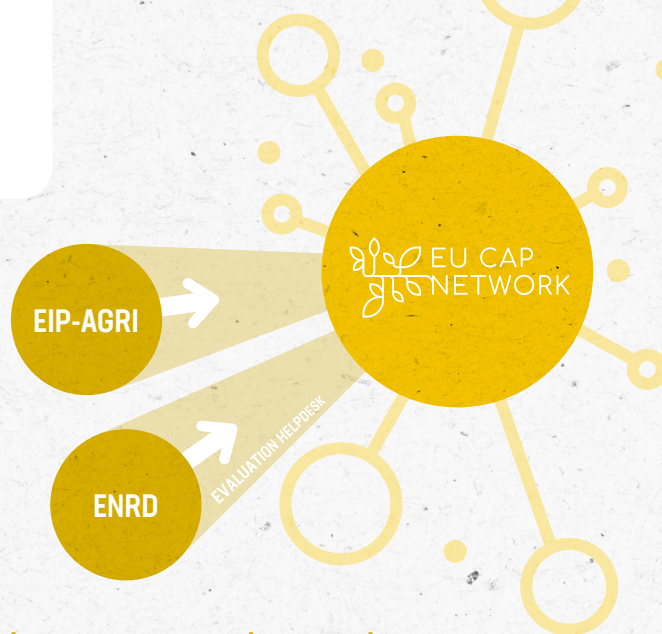
Innovation, knowledge exchange and EIP-AGRI in the EU CAP Network

In October 2022, the European Commission launched the new EU CAP Network to support the implementation of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) for the 2023-2027 period. The EU CAP Network builds on the experience of the former EIP-AGRI Network and the European Network for Rural Development, including the Evaluation Helpdesk.

What does the future hold for the new EU CAP Network, and what will be the role of innovation, knowledge exchange and EIP-AGRI? We asked Antonia Gámez Moreno, Head of Unit for Rural Areas and Networks, Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development at the European Commission.



ANTONIA GÁMEZ MORENO



Why were two networks merged into one EU CAP Network?

Antonia Gámez Moreno: "A single network will allow us to benefit from the synergies that were established by the former EIP-AGRI and ENRD networks. It will facilitate more efficient implementation of all CAP Strategic Plans, including the first pillar. For instance, innovative solutions built by EIP-AGRI Operational Groups can be a stepping stone for introducing a new eco-scheme or agri-environment-climate intervention in a CAP Strategic Plan. This supports the 'CAP Implementation' strand of the EU CAP Network, which is helping EU Member States to implement the CAP. Operational Groups can test new interventions in practice and promote their uptake by future beneficiaries. Thanks to the collaboration with the Evaluation Helpdesk strand, EU Member States already received support to evaluate their Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS), which is an illustrative example of how we develop effective synergies under a bigger EU CAP Network umbrella."

What role will innovation, knowledge exchange and EIP-AGRI play in the EU CAP Network?

Antonia Gámez Moreno: "In line with the CAP cross-cutting objective, the EU CAP Network will foster knowledge, innovation and digitalisation in agriculture, forestry and rural areas. Networking events will support knowledge exchange between farmers, foresters, researchers, advisors and other stakeholders, and foster collaboration between Operational Groups, Horizon Europe multi-actor projects and related innovative projects."

The 'innovation, knowledge exchange and EIP-AGRI' strand of the EU CAP Network will continue to build bridges between research and practice. All generated knowledge can be used by EU Member States to support their national AKIS plans, further connect people across the EU, provide up-to-date advice on best practices and technologies, and let farmers benefit from peer-to-peer learning, training and on-farm demonstrations, all supporting them in moving towards more sustainability."



How do EIP-AGRI Operational Groups fit into the new network?

Antonia Gámez Moreno: "We are very proud that more than 2 700 Operational Groups' projects were established since 2014. We still expect more projects to be announced to approach the objective of the 3 200 planned projects for the period 2014-2022. And the success continues. In recently approved CAP Strategic Plans, over 6 600 Operational Groups' projects are planned for 2023-2027!"

"The new CAP will also support transnational - including cross-border - Operational Groups, which is a novelty."

"What is also new is that Operational Groups now tackle all nine specific CAP objectives. This way, the European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural productivity and sustainability (EIP-AGRI) and its Operational Groups will create even more practice-ready, innovative solutions."



**Subscribe to the EU CAP
Network newsletter on innovation,
knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI**
to stay up to date!



Developing organic production in the EU



Knowledge and innovation help organic farming reach its full potential

Organic farming can play an important role in making EU agriculture and food systems more sustainable. It enables farmers to produce high-quality food with a low environmental impact. Knowledge exchange and advisory support are crucial in helping the sector reach its full potential.

The total area of agricultural land under organic farming in the EU is currently **9.1%**. The **Farm to Fork** and **Biodiversity Strategies** aim to extend this to at least 25% by 2030. To support this ambitious **Green Deal** goal, the European Commission's **Action Plan for the Development of Organic Production in the EU** identified several measures which aim to promote consumer trust, stimulate organic conversion and reinforce the entire value chain.

Farmers who want to convert to organic farming need a good grasp of practices and regulations at all stages of the process. The Common Agricultural Policy has strengthened advisory support to give farmers tailored and up-to-date information.

The 'Conversion to organic farming' EIP-AGRI workshop discussed innovative practices to support farmers in successfully converting to organic farming.

→ [More info on the event page.](#)

"Conversion to organic farming is knowledge-intensive. Peer-to-peer learning and knowledge exchange are crucial to guide everyone in the value chain during such a demanding process."

FRIEDRICH LEITGEB

Coordinating expert,
the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture FiBL



Italian farmer Andrea runs a 'bioactive garden' farm in the city of Florence, growing vegetables for over 100 families. **[Watch the video.](#)**



→ Find more information on the **[organic farming spotlight page.](#)**

→ Spanish mushroom producer Nazaret won the **EU organic award for best (female) organic farmer.** **[Discover all winners.](#)**

Biodistricts share experiences across borders

A biodistrict is a geographical area in which farmers, public authorities, consumers, tourist operators and other local organisations work together to manage local resources sustainably. The community maximises the area's ecological, economic and socio-cultural potential practising agricultural activities based on organic principles.

Following the 'Conversion to organic farming' EIP-AGRI workshop, representatives from the Dingle Peninsula biodistrict – the first one proposed for Ireland – went on a learning visit to the Italian Chianti biodistrict.



The visit was inspiring for sheep farmer Brigid O'Connor: "Our traditional upland farming system easily lends itself to organic agriculture. We want to farm with nature, work with schools and restaurants and put local food on local tables. I learnt a lot from the Chianti representatives and organic farmers, who developed the biodistrict together with the municipalities and community. 52% of the Chianti area consists of organic vineyards.

Diversification is encouraged and most farms complement their income through beekeeping or touristic activities, which encourages young people to stay in the area. Farmers sell locally before sourcing outside markets. The system works well for them."

"The Chianti biodistrict is much larger than our proposed one. As a result of the visit, we are looking at the possibility of increasing the biodistrict to the whole of County Kerry. This will allow us to include more farmers and a wider diversity of organic produce."

JOE KELLEHER

organic specialist at advisory service Teagasc



→ What are the benefits of biodistricts? **Watch the video.**

→ Read more in the **'Organic farming: Innovative approaches to support conversion' brochure.**



Bridging research and practice

Synergies for effective knowledge exchange in the EU CAP Network

The 'Innovation, knowledge exchange and EIP-AGRI' strand of the EU CAP Network bridges two policies: the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and Horizon Europe. Efficient connections between Horizon research and CAP-funded innovative projects such as Operational Groups can boost innovation and sustainability across the EU.

Kerstin Rosenow, Head of Unit for Research and Innovation, Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development at the European Commission, explains how the EU agricultural research and innovation under Horizon Europe can contribute to building bridges between state-of-the-art research and innovative solutions from practice.



KERSTIN ROSENOW

How will EU Research and Innovation keep addressing the needs of European farmers, foresters and rural areas in the coming years?

Kerstin Rosenow: "The interactive innovation model, which is applied in Horizon Europe multi-actor projects and EIP-AGRI Operational Groups, urges researchers to closely collaborate with farmers, foresters, advisors, rural entrepreneurs and other key stakeholders. By involving them from the start, the projects develop innovative solutions that cover real needs and are more likely to be taken up in practice. This also ensures that the practical knowledge of farmers, foresters and rural communities feeds back into the EU agricultural research and innovation under Horizon Europe, and that further evolving needs are eventually also taken up in dedicated R&I activities under future Horizon Europe Work Programmes.



All multi-actor project consortia have to share their practical outcomes in the **EIP-AGRI projects database** on the EU CAP Network website. Anyone interested in applicable solutions from Horizon research, innovation projects or best practices from EIP-AGRI Operational Groups can find them there."

How can European R&I be linked to EIP-AGRI Operational Groups and EU CAP Network activities?

Kerstin Rosenow: "Horizon Europe multi-actor projects are strongly recommended to involve Operational Groups in their work, because they tend to be locally oriented and strongly embedded in communities."

"Operational Groups can in turn be inspired by knowledge exchange with EU-wide projects, and with peers from other Member States who work in other local contexts."

"Horizon research results are shared with farmers, foresters, advisors, as well as Operational Groups and other innovative projects at EU CAP Network activities, contributing to bridging the gap between research and practice."



Thematic networks based on Operational Groups

Horizon Europe has launched several EU-wide thematic networks that share best practices from EIP-AGRI Operational Groups across borders, for a wider uptake of innovative results. The GOFORESTS Thematic Network focuses on Operational Groups from the field of (agro)forestry.

Francesca Giannetti from coordinator UNIFI: "The idea for GOFORESTS originated at the **EIP-AGRI seminar entitled 'Turning forest innovation into practice'** (2021), where several interested partners joined the same discussion group. After the event, we broadened our consortium and developed the proposal. Nationally established Operational Groups can play a key role in driving innovation at EU level. By sharing their results on business models, social innovation and improving climate resistance, we hope to foster the sustainability of the sector."



- **Learn more about GOFORESTS** and other thematic networks based on Operational Groups, such as **Oper8** and **CLIMED-FRUIT**.
- **Browse all Horizon multi-actor projects**, including thematic networks.



Thematic network GOFORESTS

Apply
Join
Share
Inspire
Innovate

EU CAP Network brokerage events inspire innovation through networking

To ensure that innovative solutions for European agriculture, forestry and rural areas are created together, shared and taken up widely, EU Member States are investing in strong Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) through their **CAP Strategic Plans**. Under the EU CAP Network, the EIP-AGRI Support Facility organises brokerage events where farmers, advisors, researchers and other relevant stakeholders can exchange knowledge and build partnerships.

At EU CAP Network brokerage events, participants can join matchmaking sessions, inspire each other and find partners to set up projects based on calls from the EU research and innovation programme Horizon Europe. By learning more about the calls, participants can improve the quality of their proposals.



Getting involved in Horizon Europe advisory networks

Advisors play a central role in encouraging the uptake of innovative solutions on the farm. The 2023-2024 Horizon Europe Work Programme includes a **call for proposals to set up EU-wide advisory networks**. In January 2023, advisors, farmers, researchers and others joined an EU CAP Network brokerage event to learn more about the calls, hear inspiring examples and meet potential partners. **Find the event results online.**

“Devote enough attention to communication and dissemination in your proposal. Their importance is often underestimated.”

SYLVAIN STUREL

Advisory network **i2connect**

→ **Get more tips & tricks to apply for Horizon Europe calls.**



- What is AKIS? Watch the **animated video** or read more in the **EIP-AGRI AKIS brochure**.
- Find all AKIS-related information, events and publications **on the AKIS spotlight page**.



On a mission for soil-based networking

Slovak farmer Robert Dohál participated in the **EIP-AGRI brokerage event** entitled **'Get involved in the EU Mission: A Soil Deal for Europe'** in June 2022.

"When I received the opportunity to apply and take part, I wanted to share my expertise – but also hear other views on soil health and ideas for potential projects."

Robert manages a 640 hectare (ha) agricultural cooperative in Krakovany-Stráže, Slovakia. He is passionate about sharing the benefits of regenerative farming and has organised soil days, on-farm demonstrations, and panel discussions on sustainable soil practices. On Wednesdays, he welcomes interested visitors to the farm.

"As a member of the **Bioeconomy Cluster**, I was approached at the event to join consortia that were planning to submit project proposals. Our farm would benefit from such collaborations. One of the applications that followed was unsuccessful, another one on carbon farming was approved, and is starting in 2023!

I learnt more about the Horizon Europe call for setting up Soil Mission Living Labs, which was a good starting point for us to attract more farmers, set goals for the group and prepare an application to potentially become the first Slovak Living Lab on regenerative farming.

After the event, representatives from Austrian organisation Humus+ came to Slovakia to present their successful business model for carbon farming. Events like these can inspire us to bring innovative ideas and collaboration opportunities back to farmers and researchers in Slovakia, and help our regenerative farming community grow."



Interested in participating in an EU CAP Network event? Then **subscribe to the newsletter on innovation, knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI** to stay updated on new calls for applications.



Focus Groups

More inspiration for innovation in the EU CAP Network

Since 2013, 46 EIP-AGRI Focus Groups have tackled specific challenges for agriculture, forestry and rural areas, ranging from renewable energy on the farm to reducing livestock emissions, tackling soil-borne diseases, mobilising forest biomass and more.

Focus Groups collect expertise and ideas from a group of 20 experts composed of farmers, foresters, advisors, researchers and rural entrepreneurs. Every year, under the EU CAP Network, three new Focus Groups will identify solutions for new topics, inspiring innovation and collaboration across the EU.

Three EU CAP Network Focus Groups began their work in early 2023:

- ✓ **Enhancing the biodiversity on farmland through high-diversity landscape features**
- ✓ **Social farming and innovations**
- ✓ **Recovery of abandoned agricultural lands**

- Discover all Focus Group topics and results **on the EU CAP Network website**.
- **Keep an eye on the monthly innovation and knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI newsletter** to stay up to date on new Focus Group calls and results.

Watch the latest Focus Group videos

- A Swedish innovative project has reconstructed **wetlands and river reservoirs to reduce flooding and nutrient loss**, and support irrigation for local farmers.
- Italian farmer Costantino is developing **sustainable ways to control the brown marmorated stink bug in orchards**.
- Flemish farmer Karin supports the use of **digital tools to improve on-farm nutrient management**.

1
topic

20
experts
from across Europe

2
meetings



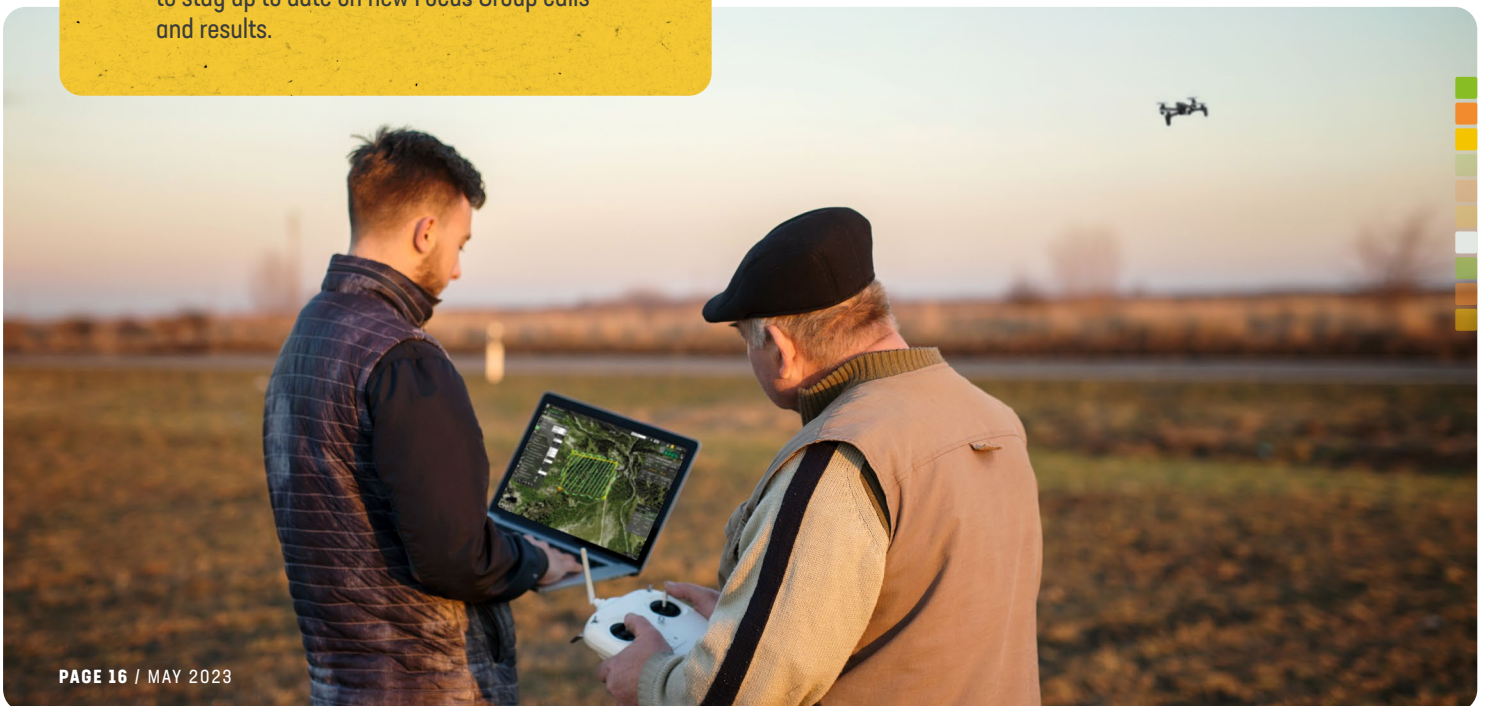
Recommendations
for further research and
innovative projects



Sharing results
to inspire innovation
across the EU



Watch the animated video.





“Providing plants with optimal moisture results in higher resistance and fewer pest problems. Farmers get better yields, save costs and produce more sustainably. We will share all results with other farmers through workshops at demonstration farms.”

MATJAŽ GLAVAN
Project Coordinator

Every drop counts: Smart irrigation for quality crops

In Slovenia, droughts and irregular rainfall are increasingly affecting the development and quality of crops. To help farmers irrigate more efficiently, the EIP PRO-PRODUCTION Operational Group is testing a decision support system based on plant needs, soil conditions and weather forecasts.

Many Slovenian regions encounter irregular rainfall and water availability shortages in spring and summer. Especially before or after flowering, drought stress can severely affect the development of olives or other fruits. Not irrigating enough can lead to lower-quality crops, while irrigating too much or at the wrong time causes nutrient and plant protection residues to leach, polluting groundwater.

The EIP PRO-PRODUCTION Operational Group has tested a system that lets farmers know when and how much to irrigate. Project Coordinator Matjaž Glavan explains: “Irrigation needs to fill the specific needs of crops and the soil they grow in. This tool generates recommendations that are tailored to soil conditions, including moisture level and water retention properties, plant needs depending on the development phase and a five-day weather forecast.”

Trials show that the tool can help farmers achieve a 24% reduction in water use, energy and CO₂ emissions.



- Get more info **in the Operational Groups database or watch the project video.**
- How can nature-based solutions increase water availability on the farm?
Take a look at the Focus Group's results.

Reducing pesticides in pome and stone fruit production

Many fruit growers rely on pesticides to produce competitive, good-quality yields. However, applying preventive, non-chemical alternatives could reduce the impact of chemical synthetic pesticides on human health and the environment. A Focus Group explored ways to reduce pesticide use in pome and stone fruit production while supporting productivity.

→ [Read all recommendations.](#)



"It was interesting to see that some EU countries already use significantly fewer pesticides than others. The conscious use of plant protection products and lower application rates that are already established should be transferred to other Member States. Along with research into sustainable alternatives, this would be a good starting point to make the EU an even more sustainable place to grow fruit."



**ELISABETH SCHWITZKY
(GERMANY)**

Farmer and Researcher,
Expert in the 'Reducing pesticides in pome and stone fruit production' Focus Group



Going digital for sustainable nutrient management

While many digital tools for on-farm nutrient management are already available on the market, their uptake is still fairly low. A Focus Group identified ways to stimulate their adoption.

Since the 1990s, Danish fertilisation regulations have become increasingly strict. In response, farmer-based research organisation SEGES Innovation developed 'Mark Online', a digital tool that allows farmers to optimise their fertilisation plans. Because farm advisors are key in encouraging the adoption of the tool on Danish farms, every advisor received intensive training. The - now mandatory - tool is currently used by farmers and advisors to optimise fertilisation for about 2.6 million hectares.

→ [More inspiration in the Focus Group report.](#)





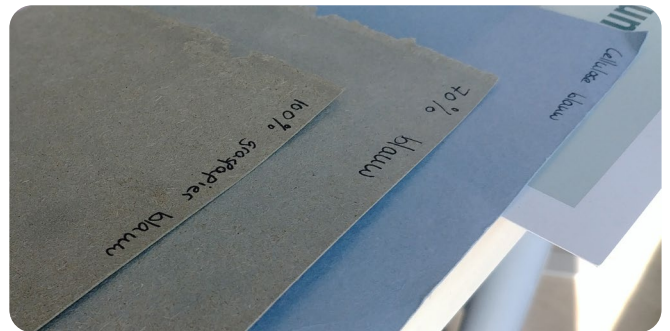
Closing the loop

Grass-based circularity for dynamic rural communities

The climate crisis, market disruptions due to Covid-19 and the war in Ukraine are putting increasing pressure on European agriculture and food production. A circular use of local resources can help reduce farmers' dependency on imported inputs and build resilient farms.

Around 21% of the EU's total surface area is covered by grassland. Horizon 2020 multi-actor project GO-GRASS is unlocking its potential by developing circular grass-based products.

At four demonstration sites in the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark and Germany, GO-GRASS is working with farmers, researchers and technology companies to turn grass into organic protein feed, animal bedding, biochar, and high-quality paper and packaging.



Project Coordinator Philipp Grundmann explains: "These innovative technologies let us make full use of underutilised resources. We are also exploring the production of bioenergy and organic fertilisers. These are highly valued by farmers in the current market situation, and can help them diversify, save costs, gain additional income and replace fossil-based products."

GO-GRASS is developing business models that can provide opportunities for rural economies. "We are evaluating different production scenarios to see which solution works best, technically and economically. Our aim is to create grass-based solutions that can be replicated on a larger scale for rural communities."

→ [More details on www.go-grass.eu](http://www.go-grass.eu)



The 'Smart circular farming to address high energy and fertiliser prices' EU CAP Network workshop stimulated collaboration across sectors to bring sustainable solutions from the lab to the ground.

→ [Find results on the event page.](#)

100% future-proof

Inspirational young entrepreneurship for thriving rural areas

The number of people living in European rural areas is steadily shrinking. Inhabitants are on average older, and young, skilled workers often move away to urban areas. Yet young people, who tend to be at the forefront of embracing innovations, can play a key role in fostering the transition to greener, more inclusive and digital rural areas with plenty of socio-economic opportunities.

In 2022, the **European Year of Youth**, rural entrepreneurs from across the EU joined the EU CAP Network workshop on young entrepreneurs. They shared inspiring ideas to build thriving rural areas through innovative entrepreneurship. We asked two young rural entrepreneurs (1) how they are making rural areas a better place to live or work in, (2) what they have learnt from the workshop and (3) what advice they would give to other young rural entrepreneurs.



NICOLAS VERDEROSA

Founder of start-up travel tech company **Ruralis.com**, promoting the digitalisation of holiday homes in Italian rural areas.

- 1 We help holiday property owners to optimise their marketing through digital platforms, improving the economic and social impact of small Italian towns. We want to show young people who currently work abroad that rural areas offer many opportunities.
- 2 The workshop allowed me to exchange ideas with other entrepreneurs who face similar challenges. For a company, it's crucial to understand the dynamics of other EU rural areas, to create services that better support local communities.
- 3 Starting a business takes a lot of hard work. It's important to keep working towards your goals. As a company, it's essential to create something new that adds value for people.



OLIVIA ELSERPETER

Food forest coordinator at citizen farm **De Biesterhof**, the Netherlands.

- 1 Our Biesterhof community forms a vibrant, multi-functional system that increases the collaboration and participation of the farmers involved, and that creates space for a multitude of farming talents - including many young women.
- 2 The event showed me the range of support available for projects like ours, although farmers may need some help in translating these support options into local opportunities.
- 3 Embrace any mistakes you may make as lessons learnt and as important chapters in your story. That will help to keep fear of failure at bay.

Dogpatch Labs is Ireland's largest start-up and innovation hub. It facilitates over 500 start-ups working onsite and runs a range of programmes that give new entrepreneurs tailored advice on scaling.



DC CAHALANE
Dogpatch Labs

“There's an understandable instinct for young entrepreneurs to think that money will solve all their problems, so they tend to apply for programmes, grants and solutions based on how much money they'll get. In the early days, though, when entrepreneurs are trying to work out the product market fit, the level of experience of the people you are connected to is far more valuable. Too much easy money can force entrepreneurs too far down a path without it having been properly validated by customers.”

- Take a look at DC's presentation and other results from the **'Young entrepreneurs - engines of innovation in rural areas' EU CAP Network workshop.**



- Learn more about the **Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas.**
- The Famigro Award rewards outstanding projects on rural entrepreneurship. **View all previous winners.**
- Fruit farmer Ricardo Soares found support for on-farm investments through state subsidies. What is his advice for other young entrepreneurs? **Watch the video.**



Farming well, feeling well



'Women in Olive Oil' network empowers, leading to more wellbeing on the farm

Many farmers are dealing with physical, mental or social challenges, such as stress from negative societal perceptions, farm succession worries, or isolation. The Greek 'Women in Olive Oil' platform is building a community to improve the skills and wellbeing of its farmers.

The global 'Women in Olive Oil' (WiOO) community was set up during the first Covid-19 lockdown to tackle social isolation for women in the olive sector. The Greek platform now supports about 120 women across Greece – mainly olive farmers but also researchers, tasters and others in the value chain.

"Our farmers often live in remote, small villages. Despite working hard and producing quality products, they are often less visible than their male colleagues, with limited access to the market or to sector innovations," says WiOO coordinator Cristina Stribacu. "Through WiOO, they can share expertise and participate in skill-building programmes. We've organised workshops to improve cultivation, production and marketing from farm to bottle, and we'll give farmers the opportunity to map the DNA of their olive trees. This will give them a competitive advantage showing authenticity. Knowing how to build a sustainable agri-business can strengthen their confidence and leadership qualities. It empowers their identity as a farmer, which is crucial for their mental and social wellbeing."

→ **More information:** www.womeninoliveoil.org



→ Thematic Network Farmwell makes innovations accessible to farmers and their families, to improve their mental, physical and social wellbeing.

Discover their social innovations database.

→ **Browse all Horizon thematic networks** in the online database.



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HORIZON EUROPE STRATEGIC PLAN 2021 - 2024 CLUSTER 6

KEY STRATEGIC ORIENTATIONS FOR R&I

KSO B: Restoring Europe's ecosystems and biodiversity, and managing sustainably natural resources

KSO C: Making Europe the first digitally enabled circular, climate-neutral and sustainable economy

IMPACT AREAS

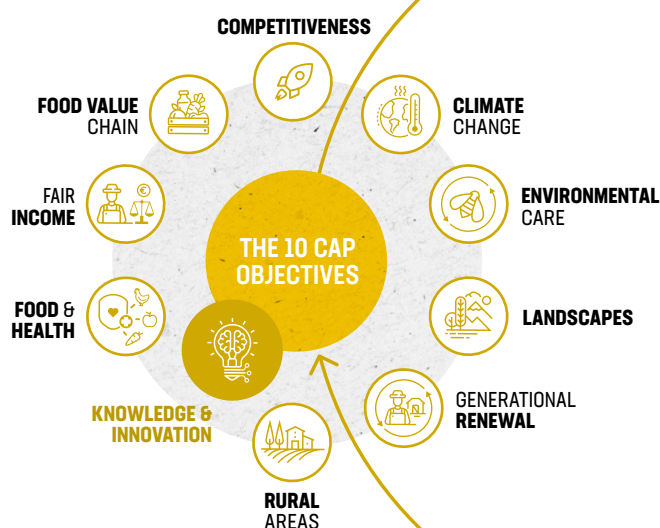
Enhancing ecosystems and biodiversity on land and in waters
Clean and healthy air, water and soil
Sustainable food systems from farm to fork on land and sea

Circular and clean economy

EXPECTED IMPACTS

27. Climate neutrality and adaption to climate change
28. Preservation and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems
30. Food and nutrition security for all from sustainable food systems from farm to fork
31. Balanced development of rural, coastal and urban areas

29. Sustainable and circular management of natural resources; tackling pollution; bioeconomy
32. Innovative governance models enabling sustainability, environmental observation



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 eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu

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³¹ While the figure shows the cluster's contribution to key strategic orientations B and C and corresponding impact areas, it should be noted that the cluster will also contribute to other key strategic orientations and impact areas not depicted in the figure.