

# 1st National Networks Meeting

## 22-23 March 2023 | Omiš, Croatia

The main objective of the 1st National Networks (NN) meeting was to exchange on the seven CAP National Networks' objectives as defined by Art. 126 of Regulation (EU) 2021/2115. These were discussed in the context of the Network Mapping exercise findings and further elaborated during dedicated parallel working sessions. Furthermore, networking under thematic clusters was initiated and updates on CAP networks' activities were provided including the announcement of the [Agricultural and Rural Inspiration Awards 2023](#) (ARIA).

### Introduction

On the second day, the NN meeting included field visits to see EAFRD funding in action in Croatia. The first project beneficiary, the Čorić family farm, invested in the production process of soparnik - one of the most famous Croatian national dishes with a protected designation of origin (PDO). The farm benefited from several Rural Development Programme (RDP) measures, namely M03 Quality systems for agricultural products and food (3.1.1), M06 Farm and business development (6.4.1), M19 LEADER and M21 Extraordinary temporary support to farmers and SMEs that are particularly affected by the crisis caused by COVID-19. Two other EAFRD-funded projects in Dugopolje (Split area) - a kindergarten and a children's playground - showcased the support from M07 Basic services and village renewal in rural areas (7.4) and M19 LEADER (19.2).

### Welcome and introduction to the day



The 1st NN Meeting was opened by Marija Čupić, the Head of Service for Programme Promotion from the Croatian Ministry of Agriculture, who welcomed participants on behalf of the State secretary Mr. Tugomir Majdak.



Antonia Gámez Moreno, the Head of Unit D1 'Rural areas and Networks' from DG AGRI/European Commission highlighted in her welcome speech that we are entering a new implementation phase with all 28 CAP Strategic Plans having been approved. Responsibilities on Member States' (MS) side has increased, generating new challenges and

### Event Information

**Date:** 22-23 March 2023

**Location:** Omiš, Croatia

**Organisers:** The CAP Implementation Contact Point (CAPI CP) and the Croatian National Network (NN)

**Participants:** 71 participants from 24 Member States

**Outcomes:** Sharing the CAPI CP Network Mapping findings; exchanging on seven CAP National Networks' objectives; initiating NN thematic clusters; and providing updates on CAP networks' activities.

**Web page:** [1st National Networks Meeting](#)

opportunities. We need to work together to successfully address these and to implement the CAP NN 7 objectives with adequate actions. On that point, NNs can fully rely on the support provided at the EU level by the EU CAP Network.

### Findings of the Networking Mapping exercise



**Michael Gregory** from the CAPI CP made a presentation on the [Network Mapping exercise](#) undertaken by the CAPI CP in the second half of 2022 in close collaboration with the NNs. The findings were presented in relation to the seven CAP NN objectives and thereby provided a good common ground for further parallel working sessions. In several cases the outlined points - NN planned activities, challenges, opportunities and support needs - were identified under multiple objectives, which underlines how complex and interconnected networking tasks are.

During the follow-up interactive exercise on 'one new thing that your NN envisages doing', the NNs were grouped into four geographic clusters (Atlantic, Central Eastern, Mediterranean, Nordic-Baltic). The outcomes of the discussions showed many commonalities. The Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS) will be the main novelty in the future activities of most NNs. The relevance of broadening NN remit and involving Pillar I stakeholders in NN activities is a common element. For some networks, the establishment of new governance structures and launching the new network is the first step to continue designing their programmes.



## Parallel working sessions on CAP National Networks' objectives

Following the interactive exercise where NNs were grouped into geographic clusters, the discussion continued with parallel working sessions organised around the following seven NNs objectives:

1. Increase the involvement of all relevant stakeholders in the implementation of CAP Strategic Plans and, where relevant, in their design.
2. Accompany the Member States' administrations in the implementation of CAP Strategic Plans and the transition to a performance-based delivery model.
3. Contribute to improving the quality of implementation of CAP Strategic Plans.
4. Contribute to the information of the public and potential beneficiaries on the CAP and funding opportunities.
5. Foster innovation in agriculture and rural development and support peer-to-peer learning and the inclusion of, and the interaction between, all stakeholders in the knowledge-exchange and knowledge-building process.
6. Contribute to monitoring and evaluation capacity and activities.
7. Contribute to the dissemination of CAP Strategic Plans results.

**Objectives 1, 2 and 3** were discussed in detail during a session linked to CAP implementation. NNs felt it was important to build on previous successes and any lessons learned from their experiences under the last programming period. The lessons learned for involving all relevant stakeholders include using strong existing networks and well-organised sectorial organisations, as well as adjusting NN activities to the specific needs of their target audience. Building open dialogue, trust and connections between the different policy units seem to be essential for improving the quality of implementation of the CAP Strategic Plans.

Future challenges and opportunities identified by NNs included reaching out to people directly - 'in the field' - including those who are not convinced about CAP support, bringing in younger generations,

increasing stakeholders' capacity to manage implementation (e.g. on eco-schemes, AKIS etc.) and engaging with Pillar I actors and the regions/provinces. Support needs will vary between national, regional and local levels and the dynamics need to be understood. Support may be needed in providing advice on how to target different audiences, identify CSP delivery model practices and facilitate NN peer exchanges, capacity building and learning.

The session on communication focused on **Objectives 4 and 7** and specifically on how to better inform and disseminate relevant content to stakeholders. The main outcome of the session was the need for further coordination on communication between National and European networks, through a communication group. Enhanced coordination and cooperation should also allow for European communication campaigns.

Based on the experience in previous years, videos and podcasts were identified as the most efficient formats to communicate when associated with a storytelling approach. However, the enlargement and diversification of the audiences coupled with an increased generational gap create challenges for the months and years to come. Sharing communication good practices, success stories and training opportunities through a communication group was seen as the best way to face these challenges jointly.

Innovation in agriculture and rural development and supporting knowledge-exchange and knowledge-building processes was the focus of the session linked to **Objective 5**. One of the main lessons learned by the NNs was the relevance of innovation brokers and brokerage activities to support the creation of ideas and partners' findings for new Operational Groups, as well as the organisation of events to disseminate projects results.

As for the future challenges and opportunities, the NNs pointed to the AKIS set-up and coordination, the involvement of farmers and connecting them with researchers. The NNs outlined that the support from the EU CAP Network will be needed mainly in fostering cross-border cooperation and learning about good practices in Member States, along with the continuation of the organisation of brokerage events supporting Horizon calls.

During the session linked to **Objective 6** on monitoring and evaluation (M&E), the NNs explained that their involvement in evaluation activities range from modest to substantial and that several past






experiences may help going forward, such as disseminating evaluation findings and preparing clear summaries of assessments to support more effective communication. Challenges included uncertainty whether they have the necessary resources and capacities to contribute to effective monitoring and evaluation, as well as addressing the extended scope within the new CAP, referring to the need to consider both rural development and direct payments and sectorial interventions.

A platform that co-creates M&E activities with key stakeholders, training activities and impactful results was suggested as a promising option to help build a stronger evaluation culture. The EU CAP Network could provide support through sharing best practices to develop evaluation-related content that is relevant for NN stakeholders and organising dedicated M&E events.

### Thematic clusters

An interactive session on thematic clusters provided an opportunity to outline several themes and explore the NN interest in follow-up online exchanges. As a result, seven thematic clusters were proposed covering: Communication (to involve Pillar 1 stakeholders and disseminate CSP progress); AKIS and innovation; the long-term Vision, Rural Pact, Rural Observatory; Rural Youth and generational renewal; Smart villages and digitalisation of agriculture; Green architecture and eco-schemes; and CAP monitoring and evaluation.

### Update on CAP networks' activities

 **Tommaso Codazzi** from the Communication and Logistical support team of the EU CAP Network made a presentation on the development of the 1st EU CAP Network Annual Work Programme (AWP). The presentation included an update on the governance of the Network, the Network's timeline for publications and major events. The participants were invited to contact the Network with their ideas for future activities.



**David Lamb**, the Team leader of the CAPI CP, announced the launch of the 2023 Agricultural & Rural Inspiration Awards (ARIA). He stressed that support is provided to NNs regarding what the award evaluators will be looking for and that the evaluation of candidates is always both fully transparent and fair.



**Maria Gustafsson** from the Swedish NN presented 'Rural Pact Conference' (Uppsala, 3-4/05/2023) and other events under the Swedish Presidency in the EU Council. The Rural Pact conference forms part of the 2023 Swedish 'Rural Week' which will take place all over Sweden in both physical and digital forms. The conference will also feed into a further Rural Pact event to be held under the Spanish Presidency in the second half of 2023.



**Pawel Krzczunowicz** from the Polish NN informed participants about the next two 'Network to Innovate' events: Crop biodiversity on 08/04 and LEADER projects supporting agriculture on 16/05. Pawel then invited the Networks to the forthcoming NN meeting in Poland, provisionally scheduled for September 2023.

### Closing remarks

Antonia Gámez Moreno from DG AGRI underlined the intense work and many exchanges during the day and appreciated the NNs' commitment to the EU CAP Network. She reminded the participants that the NNs are instrumental in contributing to a successful CAP and that sharing experiences is very important for this. Thanks was given to the four teams supporting the Network at the EU level, the Croatian NN and to everyone present at the meeting.