


CAP Evaluation News

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New CAP evaluation guidelines set to address unknowns facing AKIS assessments

To what extent does AKIS' strategic approach contribute to the achievement of the CAP's cross-cutting objective of modernisation? A new Thematic Working Group on AKIS aims to answer this question with a new set of non-binding guidelines currently under development – and its insights are already revealing the path ahead.



The European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP has organised a new [Thematic Working Group on Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System \(AKIS\)](#) where various stakeholders are exploring the scope of needed evaluations in the new programming period, including representatives from Managing Authorities, CAP networks, DG Agri, researchers advisors, evaluators, farmers, and NGOs.

Around 50 of these experts participated in the first three meetings and collaborated to develop key evaluation elements such as possible evaluation questions, factors of success, indicators, and data recommended for Member States when evaluating AKIS' strategic approach, which refers to the combination of AKIS interventions.

Despite having a long history, AKIS only entered the CAP for the first time in the 2023–2027 programming period - Member States were obliged to describe an 'AKIS strategic approach' in their CAP Strategic Plans. This will set a strong basis to carry out related evaluations in future. AKIS is in fact one of the mandatory elements of the CAP Strategic Plans to be assessed.



This evaluation may demonstrate how the AKIS strategic approach contributes to the cross-cutting objective of modernisation, by assessing elements such as the design of the AKIS strategic approach, implementation, knowledge flows and links between research and practice, farm advice and the interconnection of advisors. The evaluations may also look at the contribution of the AKIS strategic approach to the other nine specific objectives of the CAP, where relevant.

The group has discussed potential evaluation approaches for the AKIS strategic approach and identified that the theory of change is among the most suitable ones given the varied structure in each Member State, from stakeholders involved to different desired outcomes. This approach should touch upon the analysis of the organisational set-up of AKIS and assess how advisory services, research, and the national CAP networks collaborate to provide advice, knowledge flows, and innovation support services. Several methods and tools were also proposed that adequately fit the purpose of system analysis, review of theory of change and collective learning.

The final outcome of the working group will be a non-binding methodological guidance that may be used by Member States to evaluate the AKIS strategic approach in the context of CAP Strategic Plans. During a consultation in October 2022, draft guidelines were already discussed with a variety of stakeholders, and based on their feedback, they are currently being finalised. By the end of 2022, the guidelines will be published and will provide a number of recommendations to consider when evaluating AKIS in Member States.



The AKIS guidelines are not a binding document. Evaluations in each Member State should be tailored to the specificities of their CAP Strategic Plan intervention logic and how these systems are organised. Managing Authorities and evaluators will therefore find inspiration in the guidelines when planning their assessments of the AKIS strategic approach.



Putting the evaluation pieces in place to assess the next CAP's performance

The role of Member States in demonstrating impact

Feeding Europe's growing population requires more sustainable food production, but another summer of extreme weather, alongside severely disrupted supply chains, have once again highlighted the need to move towards a more resilient and regenerative food system – and the next CAP is set to see Member States refocus the policy on results through new monitoring and evaluation expectations.

Measuring real-world impact is vital for showing the success of a policy in meeting its objectives, particularly when the aim is to address a range of economic, environmental and social factors. The next CAP is therefore shifting Member States away from compliance and more towards results and performance, hoping it can show how their agriculture sectors and rural areas are on the sustainable path ahead.

Results will be anchored in how Member States contribute to the CAP's objectives, from decreasing greenhouse gas emissions in agriculture to the stability or increase of agricultural income and growing of rural businesses. The rulebook on how Member States will exactly demonstrate the CAP's impact to these objectives is based around a new framework that provides a common understanding on monitoring performance and evaluating the implementation of Strategic Plans.

The Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (PMEF) will “*allow reporting, monitoring, and evaluation of the performance*” throughout the implementation of Member States' CAP Strategic Plans during 2023-27. It will set the basis to monitor Member States' progress towards achieving the targets of CAP Strategic Plans, to assess the impact, effectiveness, efficiency, relevance and coherence of the interventions of the CAP Strategic Plans and Union added value of the CAP, and support a common learning process for monitoring and evaluation.

The PMEF also contains a set of common indicators for monitoring, evaluation and annual performance reporting, such as output indicators for monitoring the implementation of the CAP, result indicators to monitor Member States' progress towards pre-set targets, and context and impact indicators to assess the overall policy performance against CAP objectives. This information will differ depending on how each Member State designs and implements its national CAP Strategic Plan because it covers the different measures available under direct payments and sectoral programmes, funded by the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF), as well as rural development interventions, funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD).





Critically, the PMEF provides significant flexibility for Member States compared to previous CAP programming periods, allowing them to design their evaluation activities according to the progress of their Strategic Plans. Although no evaluation milestones are set, unlike the enhanced Annual Implementation Reports of 2017 and 2019, Member States must still undertake comprehensive evaluation activities during the implementation of their CAP Strategic Plans. According to the recently published [Implementing Act](#) by the European Commission, Member States must assess the effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence, Union added value and impact of every specific objective addressed in the context of their CAP Strategic Plans – at an appropriate point during the implementation period. In doing so, they may group together, in a single evaluation, several specific objectives, ensuring that the contribution of the underlying interventions to each specific objective is clearly and separately estimated.

Beyond assessing performance towards specific objectives, Member States must also undertake evaluations of specific topics, such as environmental and climate architecture, added value of LEADER, AKIS or CAP Networks. Finally, a comprehensive evaluation of the CAP Strategic Plans and the contribution to the general objectives of the CAP must be done ex-post by each Member State and completed by the end of 2031.

Tips to prepare for the PMEF

- 1 Identify all relevant stakeholders and develop an effective and inclusive evaluation governance system.
- 2 Develop a comprehensive intervention logic for each specific objective, considering the timing of each intervention's implementation.
- 3 Draft a comprehensive Evaluation Plan and check for synergies in interventions that could allow grouping of several specific objectives in a single evaluation.
- 4 Structure IT systems for effectively and efficiently collecting and reporting data for output and result indicators as well as for the disaggregated data for monitoring and evaluation.
- 5 Identify data gaps that could hinder the measurement of the anticipated change and its attribution to the interventions of the CAP Strategic Plans and develop a strategy for closing them.



Why planning and performance go hand-in-hand

The increased flexibility and requirements detailed above require a thorough planning of evaluation activities. For this, each Member State must design an 'Evaluation Plan' which sets out its own objectives based on the country's evaluation-related needs. It must also describe how these objectives will be achieved by addressing governance and coordination of evaluations, along with an indicative timeline covering approaches to data collection, communication of evaluation findings and capacity building.

Stakeholders' participation is key to the development and implementation of a sound and inclusive evaluation strategy, and for this Member States are being called upon to map all relevant stakeholders and their specific needs, both in terms of evaluation topics and needed capacity building. Moreover, the Evaluation Plan must be presented to and discussed with the members of the Monitoring Committee of each CAP Strategic Plan.

Equipped with the tools provided by the PMEF and a strong Evaluation Plan, Member States can then demonstrate the impact of their CAP Strategic Plans to economic, environmental and social goals for agri-food sector and rural areas, but their role doesn't stop at their borders. They are also fundamental data providers enabling the Commission to demonstrate the impact of the CAP at the EU level. Member States will provide the Commission with data concerning the output and result indicators by means of the Annual Performance Reports, and in addition they will share disaggregated anonymised data for every intervention and beneficiary, as well as for specific topics like sectoral interventions, EIP operational groups and LEADER. Additionally, Member States will share the findings of all the evaluations completed during the evaluation and ex post, allowing the Commission to synthesise them and paint the picture of the joint effort towards the achievement of the CAP objectives.

Having all these findings and data creates an even bigger advantage to academics and researchers, ultimately opening up the CAP's implementation to more intense scrutiny – and ensuring a transparent debate that can shape a future CAP that demonstrates impact across the EU.

Support for life under the PMEF

Recent activities from the [European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP](#) that can help Member States prepare for life under the PMEF.

- Support Member States in designing their Evaluation Plans;
- Exchanges of information through EvaluationEXPLORE!, an online forum, where stakeholders from two or more Member States identify and understand evaluation-related needs and share good practices;
- Support for the evaluation of Pillar I types of interventions and AKIS and, through a dedicated Good Practice Workshop and the development of a corresponding guidance document respectively;
- Identification of good practices through in-depth appraisals of various evaluations already completed at Member State or EU level.
- Thematic Working Groups on specific evaluation topics, such as AKIS and animal welfare
- Answer specific PMEF questions from Member States and CAP evaluation stakeholders





What else has changed?

Compared to the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (CMEF) of the CAP 2014-2022, the PMEF will introduce a range of new aspects for Member States.

Scope



- For the first time, the new policy architecture does not distinguish between Pillars, as CAP Strategic Plans contain interventions related to both European agricultural funds. This provides unique opportunities for Member States to assess synergies between the various types of interventions and evaluate the implementation of the CAP as a whole.
- The scope of output indicators is extended beyond monitoring and evaluation. Output indicators now become a means for checking also eligibility of expenditure, through annual performance clearance.

Planning



Evaluation Plans are not part of CAP Strategic Plans and should be submitted to the Monitoring Committee no later than one year after the adoption of the CAP Strategic Plan. They can be updated without modifying a Strategic Plan, which opens up new possibilities to encourage stakeholders to collaborate and develop documents to steer more effective monitoring and evaluation activities.

Indicators, data & objectives



- All PMEF indicators are defined in the basic act (Annex I of [EU Regulation 2021/2115](#)), while precise definitions of indicators and methodology for data collection are provided by means of detailed [indicator fiches](#) and a corresponding implementing act ([EU Regulation 2021/2290](#)) available to Member States from the beginning of the programming period.
- Additional disaggregated and anonymised data necessary for the monitoring and evaluation of the CAP are also detailed in a second Commission Implementing Regulation ([EU Regulation 2022/1475](#)) well before the start of the implementation of CAP Strategic Plans.
- Impact indicators are related to the specific objectives and used for the evaluation of CAP Strategic Plans. Along with result indicators and other elements of CAP Strategic Plans, they are used to demonstrate greater ambition in environmental and climate-related objectives. Moreover, specific and measurable factors of success, closely related to the impact and result indicators are introduced in the latest Implementing Regulation, fostering higher quality of the evaluations both at the Member State and the EU level.



The next CAP will see a greater need for quantitative evaluation – European Commission’s Sophie Helaine

The new programming period will see Member States take on more responsibility in evaluating the CAP and this will see a greater need for more quantification skills, according to Sophie Helaine, Head of the European Commission’s Unit for Policy Performance (A.3).



Q: The next programming period marks a new era of CAP evaluations, why was it important to extend the scope of national assessments to cover both Pillar 1 and 2 interventions?

A: We have to help farmers transition towards more sustainable agriculture and this requires a strategic approach where Member States can choose from instruments in both Pillars, provided they reach the CAP’s objectives. This is where we need evaluation to assess whether the interventions implemented are delivering on CAP objectives, from enhancing protection of natural resources and reducing greenhouse gas emissions to supporting a fair income for farmers and ensuring food security.

Q: How will this new approach change the nature of CAP evaluations?

A: The biggest change is moving from compliance to results. The PMEF is the framework to enable the assessment of the CAP on a national and EU level, particularly when we speak about results for environmental and climate measures. Meanwhile, this shift towards results mean we need to increase quantification methods to demonstrate the performance of the CAP with hard facts.

Q: How can evaluators develop their quantification skills?

A: We need to increase the technical capacity around quantification and there is a clear need to push, and support, Member States in increasing that capacity. CAP Strategic Plans can help because they can provide resources to develop these skills and offer more money to support contractors and evaluators.

Member States could also help by improving data sharing and put some leeway on data protection issues. If we have more data sharing and interoperability among Member States then there would be much stronger understanding to effectively assess the CAP.

Saying that, this quantitative focus will not replace the importance of qualitative information because that gives us the insights into what’s behind the data – they should complement each other. For example, interviews with stakeholders might differ from a quantitative analysis. Evaluators that can interpret this mix of quantitative and qualitative skills will deliver very strong CAP assessments.

Q: How will the European Commission support these changing needs of CAP evaluations?

A: We are strongly supporting the JRC and Eurostat and the LUCAS (Land Use and Coverage Area frame) survey to make sure that we have the right data points for evaluations, as well as to improve the sampling and periodicity. Additionally, we are trying to develop modelling tools for establishing causality between the CAP and the status of nature. That’s one the biggest difficulty we face because this is also where everybody is looking at us.

We also want to harvest everything we can on the current CAP that can be useful for the thinking of the next programming period and beyond. For example, some Member States have developed some effective quantification analysis and these good practices can help others. These skills, along other good practices needed for future CAP evaluation needs, will be disseminated through the Evaluation Helpdesk.





Austria – an expert’s view on how CAP evaluations are changing

Each issue of CAP Evaluation News explores one EU Member State to learn more about their approach to assessing agriculture and rural development policy. This time around we speak to Andreas Resch, an Austrian evaluator, about what it’s like conducting evaluations in Austria and what he expects may change in the new programming period.



Q: Can you describe the evaluation system in Austria?

A: The evaluation of rural development and the CAP Strategic Plan is the responsibility of a separate department in the BML (ministry for agriculture) (Department II/1), which is independent of the managing authority (Department II/2), but of course they work closely together. A large number of actors at federal and regional level are also involved in the evaluation, both those who implement the programme and those who carry out the evaluation. Stakeholder management and involvement is therefore very important. In previous years, the yearly Evaluation Helpdesk capacity building workshop provided a very good, almost unique, platform for an exchange between technical departments and evaluators.

Q: What was your evaluation highlight over the last 12 months and why?

A: The evaluation of “[Short food supply chains](#)” (Text in German - part of the Austrian RDP 2014-2022) was very important for me because I could demonstrate the practical application of the theory of change for an impact evaluation. It is a real challenge to put this demanding method into practice without exceeding the time and budget limits of an assignment.

Q: What are some of the biggest evaluation changes facing Austria in the new programming period?

A: A completely new field of work is efficiency evaluation, in order to estimate the proportionality of effort to goal achievement (efficiency evaluation builds on impact evaluation). Appropriate, practicable evaluation approaches must first be tested here.

What is missing so far is a concept to ensure the coherence and consistency of the many individual evaluation studies. The methodological approaches of different studies often come from different scientific disciplines. It would be necessary to arrive at summarised statements, as the detailed examination of a multitude of indicators and individual questions can obstruct the view of the whole.

Q: How do you see the role of Austria’s evaluators changing in the new programming period?

A: Evaluators need to think more in terms of contexts and not only in terms of individual interventions in order to assess, for example, the functioning of the green architecture in the CAP Strategic Plans. We need an evaluation culture that works on an overall synthesis level, not just tracked into single interventions, which is quite difficult because evaluators often have different disciplines. For instance, to be able to assess climate effects or biodiversity effects, because a lot of CAP interventions do work together, evaluation disciplines need to come together too.

Q: What could help create an evaluation culture that creates more synthesised assessment of CAP Strategic Plans?

A: We would need new contracts that contain a terms of reference that promotes this synthesis because then evaluators can adapt their methodology. It means they are not just looking on isolated parts of the CAP, but in a broader dimension. This could also integrate experts from other fields so a synthesis can be realised on the ground.





EU CAP Network explores ingredients for a successful evaluation

At the launch of the EU CAP Network, participants from across Europe created recipes for a successful CAP evaluation and identified greater stakeholder involvement, clearly set objectives and concise outcomes as key ingredients for future assessments.



Hundreds of stakeholders celebrated the launch of the EU CAP Network in Brussels, Belgium, where the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD), including the European Evaluation Helpdesk on 6 October, and EIP-AGRI all came together under one banner.

The occasion was marked by several workshops including a series of evaluation-related sessions. In one working session EU CAP Network stakeholders, such as Managing Authorities, evaluators, paying agencies, chambers of commerce and National CAP Networks, discussed the ingredients for an effective CAP evaluation.

Together, they created several recipes for successful evaluations with each one highlighting the need for greater stakeholder engagement in developing and disseminating the results of CAP evaluations. This was seen as particularly important as Member States are in need of more

expertise to evaluate Pillar 1 interventions, as part of the new requirements of the next CAP.

Stakeholders from Managing Authorities further identified the need for simple, clear and tailored evaluation results that they can easily and quickly act upon, while evaluators called for clear objectives from government bodies to help ensure they effectively focus their assessments, and the subsequent results.

High quality data along with sufficient time and resources were also signalled as important ingredients for any effective CAP evaluation, which could be complemented by widespread adoption of good evaluation practices and greater cooperation between Managing Authorities and evaluators. One recipe suggested establishing ongoing dialogue between key players involved in an evaluation, such as data providers and agricultural groups, to ensure the results are targeted and result in changes at the farm level.



The Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP concluded the day's workshops with a session on how the EU CAP Network could support CAP evaluations. Participants shared their experiences and grouped roles into two broad categories – the first being those that create and provide inputs, such as knowledge, skills, best practices and methods for evaluations, while the other was seen to play more of a 'multiplier' role that disseminates inputs and results. The hope among many participants was that these two groups would reinforce each other and strengthen the evaluation culture in the EU, ultimately leading to a stronger CAP.

Preparing to track the next CAP's environmental impact

On 20-21 September, the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture and the ENRD Contact Point [organised an event](#) on the new green architecture of the CAP and discussed issues facing the implementation of Strategic Plans, which showed how some Member States are planning to track and assess environmental impact.

Annemiek Hautvast, CAP Strategic Plan Director from the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, kicked off the conference by saying the Netherlands is facing serious challenges to improve biodiversity, water quality and climate action, but their Strategic Plan is designed to achieve the needed progress largely through eco-scheme payments.

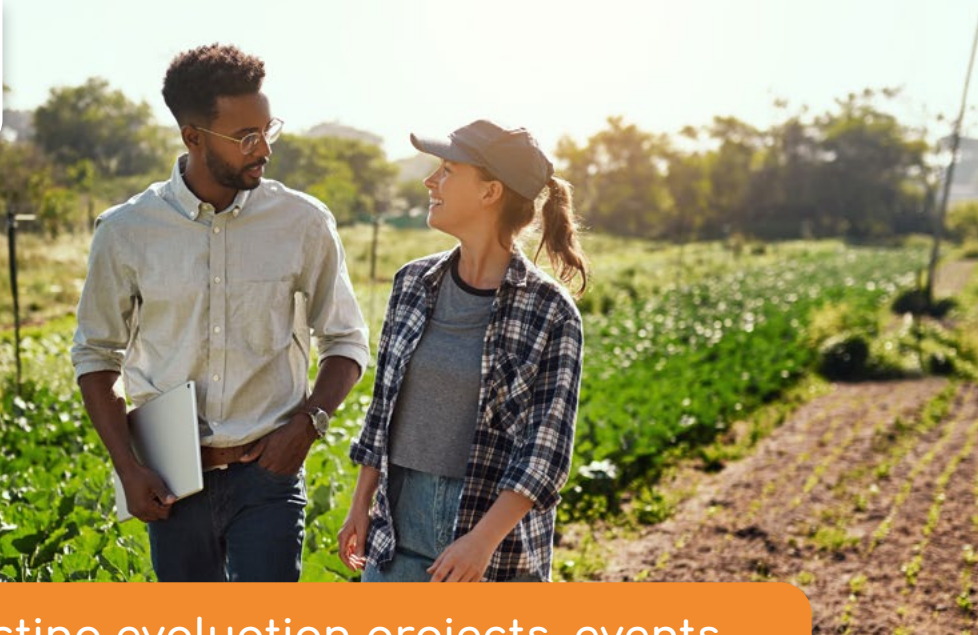
"If farmers do more, they can get more," said Hautvast, adding that demonstrating impact depends on farmers adopting the right practices, which in turn requires effective communication from policymakers to the agriculture sector.

The Netherlands told the conference that it will track progress through 20 eco-schemes and a tiered system where farmers choose different levels of ambition. For example, one eco-scheme centres on managing hedgerows and applying herb-rich field margins to growing protein crops, which enables farmers to receive compensation of approximately €60, €100 or €200 per hectare, depending on their level of action. Another representative from the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture explained they will track progress by linking its eco-schemes to the [PMEF](#) indicators that they believe will demonstrate the most impact.

The European Commission later [provided insights](#) into the first batch of approved CAP Strategic Plans which showed a sample of over 700 interventions linked to the PMEF's [results indicators](#) (R.) in nine Member States, with the most common ones selected also being related to environmental impact.

This analysis was based on the CAP Strategic Plans of Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Ireland, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, and Spain. In 2023, a comprehensive mapping and analysis of each Member States' CAP interventions will be conducted, after the adoption of all 28 Strategic Plans.





Know any interesting evaluation projects, events, publications or other initiatives?

CAP Evaluation News welcomes any contribution from its readers – get in touch by emailing evaluation@eucafnetwork.eu.

Events Calendar

Below is a pick of the latest upcoming events that can help evaluation stakeholders improve the quality and effectiveness of CAP assessments across the EU.



March – Third Good Practice Workshop: CAP Evaluation Plans (TBC)



20-21 April 2023 – [51th Annual conference of the Swiss Society for Agricultural Economics and Agricultural Sociology \(SGA\) 'Transformation of agri-food systems – sustainability and digitalization of food value chains'](#)



24-28 April 2023 – [Youth in evaluation week](#)



29 August - 1 September 2023 – [European Association of Agricultural Economists \(EAAE\) Congress](#)

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