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NEWSROOM

CAP evaluators recommended to use quasi-experimental methods when assessing direct payments

The latest Good Practice Workshop report revealed that creative methods are needed to distinguish the effects of direct payments and found that evaluators can forge a path ahead by using quasi-experimental analysis tools, such as the 'Dose Response Function'.

In November 2022, over 90 evaluation stakeholders from across Europe came together in Athens, Greece, to discuss how to assess direct payments under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) – a new obligation for EU Member States in the 2023-2027 programming period.

The workshop was organised by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP. Its [final report](#) details several challenges facing future direct payment evaluations, including how to demonstrate net contributions to farmers' income given that earnings are also shaped by price volatilities and geopolitical uncertainties.

The workshop concluded that evaluators can overcome such challenges by thinking 'outside the box' and utilising innovative methods rarely used in agricultural evaluations, such as the 'Dose Response Function' based on the Generalised Propensity Score Matching (GPSM) method. This method relies on information on the structure and intensity of support and enables an estimation of the effects, conditional on observable determinants of support intensity.

This insight emerged following [expert presentations and brainstorming sessions](#) at the Good Practice Workshop in Greece, where participants also said that the effectiveness of direct payment evaluations can be further enhanced by focusing on a sector or region and examining different intensities of support – without losing sight of the need to assess the

contribution of direct payments to CAP Specific Objectives. Data was also identified as an issue for direct payment evaluations, but the report outlines that the right information can be obtained by involving the relevant data providers early on in the evaluation process, such as Paying Agencies, local or regional authorities, relevant statistical offices and other researchers.

The report added that capacity building around direct payments evaluation will be of "utmost importance" for Managing Authorities and evaluators alike. These activities should also extend their focus beyond training and include analysis and understanding of the intervention logic of direct payments, i.e. the aims and expected contributions to multiple objectives (competitiveness, socioeconomic and environmental) and the exogenous factors that may intervene in the achievements of their objectives.



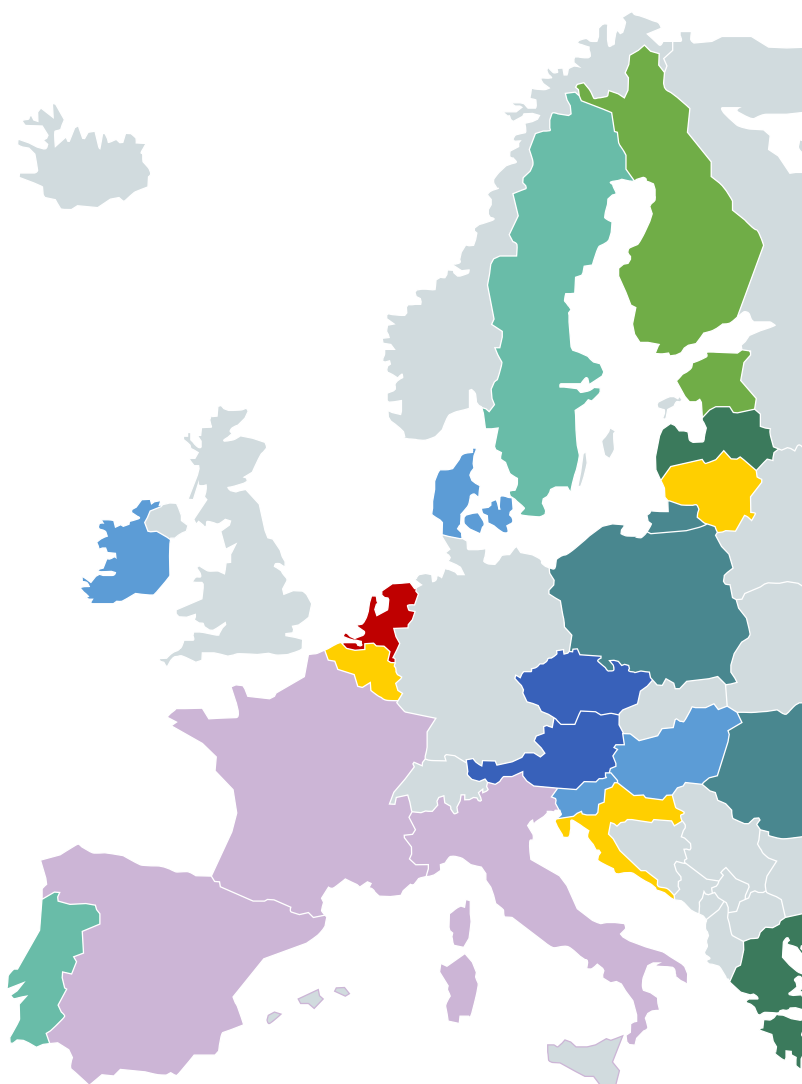
Evaluation-PEERS! in 2022 - A big year for peer-learning

Last year, the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP kick-started a new kind of peer-learning event for EU Member States called 'EvaluationPEERS!', where two or more countries shared their valuable evaluation experiences - with more to come in 2023.

EvaluationPEERS! events are designed to help EU Member States exchange best evaluation practices developed in previous CAP programming periods and discuss future challenges and solutions.

Since the launch of EvaluationPEERS in November 2022, a total of 255 participants have attended the 11 capacity building events, most of them being Managing Authorities (47%) and evaluators (9%), as well as representatives from Paying Agencies, National CAP Networks, researchers, data providers, Monitoring Committee members and the European Commission.

The workshops are focused on general topics, like evaluation governance and data management, or more focused on specific and in-demand areas, such as CAP impacts on competitiveness and data management for environmental assessments. The Evaluation Helpdesk's geographic experts worked with Managing Authorities to facilitate the discussions while thematic experts presented in-depth knowledge when needed.



EU Member States will now have the chance to participate in more EvaluationPEERS! events throughout 2023, as part of the two capacity-building activities per EU Member State offered by the Evaluation Helpdesk. To find out more, contact evaluation@eucapnetwork.eu.



Peer-learning perspectives

"EvaluationPEERS! is a good opportunity to get to know the evaluation stakeholders in EU Member States better and to foster bilateral networking," said Valdis Kudiņš, Geographic Expert for Latvia.

"Our event was a very technical capacity building meeting, and it was very helpful at the time of drafting the evaluation plan. I wish we had such meetings for all the impact indicators," said Anthi Katsirma, from Greece's Managing Authority.

"The event was very useful and practical to share good practices with experts who are hands on in a topic," said Maris Kruuse, an evaluator from Estonia.

Event	Topic
AT-CZ	Governance and coordination
BE(FL)-NL	Interventions with multiple objectives
BE(WL)-HR-LT	Stakeholder involvement in evaluations
PT-SE	Stakeholder involvement in evaluations
CY-MT	Environmental indicators
HU-IE-SI-DK	Assessment of impacts: Environment
LU-EE-FI	Data management for environmental assessment
PL-RO	Data management for environmental assessment
FR-IT-ES	Governance and coordination
GR-LV	Assessment of impacts: Competitiveness



NEWSROOM

EU Member States explore how to enhance stakeholder mapping and engagement for CAP evaluations

The role of stakeholders in CAP evaluations is evolving as the new programming period requires all relevant groups to be considered when planning evaluation and capacity building activities.

In response, the Evaluation Helpdesk recently organised EvaluationPEERS! meetings involving Belgium, Lithuania, Hungary, Sweden and Portugal, where evaluators and Managing Authorities explored ways to improve stakeholder mapping before discussing how to enhance their engagement in the CAP assessment process.

In these meetings, the Evaluation Helpdesk presented one possible methodology for a stakeholder engagement strategy, which built upon existing knowledge of mapping and classification of stakeholders. According to this methodology, a successful strategy for future engagement should start by setting clear objectives tailored to each targeted group.

For instance, the objectives for stakeholders with 'low interest and power' to affect the implementation and evaluation of a CAP Strategic Plan can focus on providing information, while those with 'high interest and power' may focus more on closer collaboration. The next step can then be to define which stakeholders should be engaged, at which stage of the CAP evaluation process and how, while also detailing the tools that could be used to involve them - in line with the respective objectives set out in the first step.

During the EvaluationPEERS! events, EU Member States also described the need to develop new skills to support this engagement process and identified the following challenges to overcome:

- › mapping correct stakeholders for each context and evaluation topic;
- › finding appropriate ways to engage stakeholders effectively;
- › keeping stakeholders interested and involved during the evaluation exercise, while reducing their administrative burden;
- › communicating effectively with different groups of stakeholders;
- › providing tailor-made capacity building activities and developing an evaluation culture for each stakeholder group, especially for those involved in the implementation of direct payments.

Participants then recommended that future stakeholder engagement strategies could overcome these challenges by incorporating a focus on methodological approaches (through exchange of practices), consideration of the CAP's changing context and innovative use of new technologies.

EU Member States concluded that employing a more structured approach in identifying and engaging stakeholders, using the tools developed by the Evaluation Helpdesk, such as the '[Design of evaluation plan guidelines](#)', would also go a long way towards improving the effectiveness of stakeholder participation in future CAP evaluations.



SPOTLIGHT

How evaluation plans lay the foundations for better CAP assessments

EU Member States must develop an evaluation plan for the new CAP with this blueprint acting as a key tool to demonstrate impact across all the objectives of the 2023-27 agriculture and rural development policy.

An evaluation plan clarifies the 'what', 'how' and 'why it matters' while charting the direction that evaluations must take to ensure that they take into account everything from policy priorities to budget constraints.

For the new CAP, the evaluation plan is the instrument for EU Member States to structure, manage and steer assessments of their CAP Strategic Plans. It also helps achieve a common understanding on evaluation needs, objectives, responsibilities and tasks while contributing to the identification of appropriate data and resources, as well as establishing greater transparency and ability to steer future policy design.

For the 2023-2027 period, EU Member States are required to develop an evaluation plan that contains information on the intended activities, which must be structured around a minimum

of seven interlinked sections, specified in [Annex II of Implementing Regulation \(EU\) 2022/1475](#).

This intertwined approach is essential. For instance, needs and objectives determine the choice of evaluation activities, which, in turn, must be reflected in the timeline and determine the data and information required to meet them. Having this clear and well-structured timeline is also critical to ensure effective communication of evaluation results, follow-up activities and capacity building – critical steps to support the development of the next CAP.

Stakeholder mapping will also have an integrated role throughout the plan as it will capture the new responsibilities and evaluation needs required by the 2023-27 CAP. For example some stakeholders may be part of the governance and coordination structure, while some may be data providers or play a role in the communication of results.

Governance and coordination is another cross-cutting element of the plans as those involved with CAP evaluations will provide input to the needs and objectives, timeline, provision of data and information, and the organisation of technical support and capacity building.

Finally, the level of ambition of the evaluation plan, i.e. the range and intensity of planned evaluation activities and the data collection needs, will determine the resources and technical support required in the coming years. The opposite may also be the case, i.e. the available resources may influence the level of ambition of the evaluation plan.

In addition to the minimum content detailed above, EU Member States are encouraged to provide additional information to promote better planning, implementation and use of evaluations. For instance, there is currently no section proposed by the Regulation to describe evaluation activities, although they need to be reflected in the timeline and their description is vital in ensuring that the evaluation plan is robust. Likewise, the governance and evaluation section would benefit from additional information on the envisaged



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structures to effectively manage the planning, implementation and quality of evaluations.

The overarching goal is that these interlinked sections work together so that evaluation plans not only improve the CAP's overall evaluation framework, but also help EU Member States go beyond the legal requirements of their Strategic Plans.

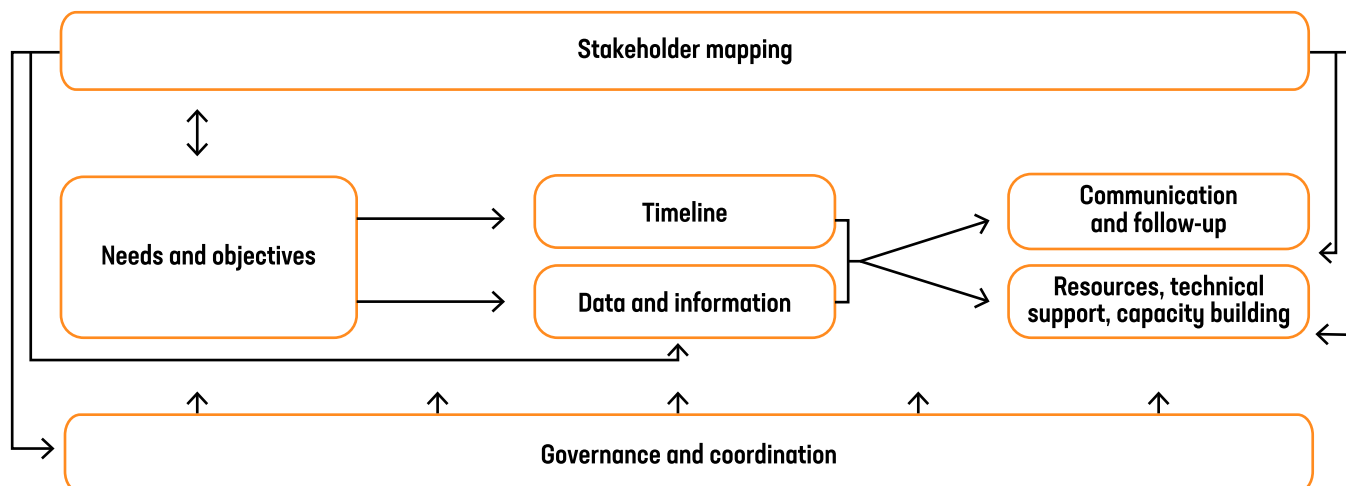
Novelties and challenges

EU Member States already have vast experience with evaluation planning from their Rural Development Programme in the 2014-20 period, but they may need to consider some new and challenging aspects in the future. For example, each country must conduct direct payments evaluations, which were typically done at the EU level previously, but now form part of the CAP Strategic Plan intervention logic. This means that national evaluations may examine measures with significantly bigger impacts than the last programming period.

The stakeholder mapping is another new element of evaluation plans, which is relevant for data provision, communication activities and supporting policy design. It will help decide on the most relevant groups and/or evaluation governance structures in relation to planning, tendering, implementing, quality control, dissemination and follow-up of evaluation findings. For example, National CAP Networks are now expected to have a bigger role in national monitoring and evaluation activities.

An additional novelty are the key evaluation elements used when assessing the effectiveness of CAP Strategic Plans, such as 'viable farm income' or 'resilience' (listed in [Annex I of Regulation \(EU\) 2022/1475](#)). Unlike the last programming period, there are no common evaluation questions in the current [Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Framework](#), which means that the evaluation elements may guide EU Member States towards what is important to assess, given the intervention logic of their CAP

The links between the seven main sections of the evaluation plan for the new CAP Strategic Plans





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Strategic Plans. These evaluation elements are further supported by factors of success, also understood as 'judgment criteria' or 'points of comparison', which can be understood as a means to measure the achievement of the key evaluation element (Annex I recommends several factors of success for all evaluation elements).

One of the most important purposes of the evaluation plan is to ensure the data needed is available on time, in the appropriate format and of a high quality required to identify data needs and sources, which can help overcome data gaps. This can be challenging as some EU Member States may need new data sources to assess measures like direct payments, but the evaluation plan guidelines, developed by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP, can support them in identifying data needs and gaps that can also capture all the required and potential indicators.

All the above gives EU Member States more flexibility in structuring their evaluation plans according to the intervention logic of their CAP Strategic Plan, while aligning it to the needs of different stakeholders. This means that the importance of the evaluation plan as an information and planning tool has grown, which requires extra attention to make it relevant for an EU Member State and their CAP Strategic Plan. To help guarantee success, the process of developing the evaluation plan must therefore be seen as being as important as the final outcome – after all, if the right plan is in place, good results follow.



Guidance available for evaluation plans

The Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP has produced guidance for the design of evaluation plans. It consists of evaluation plan guidelines and an evaluation plan toolbox, outlining a suggested structure and content of evaluation plans in accordance with the EU Implementing Regulation. They also suggest additional content for the evaluation plan aiming for better planning, implementation and clarity on key terms and questions that EU Member States could ask when drawing up their evaluation plans. The toolbox proposes detailed working steps for developing each section of the evaluation plan, together with tools and checklists for each step.

A forum for exchange and networking on evaluation planning

The EvalPLATFORM is an informal exchange channel established by the Evaluation Helpdesk for Managing Authorities. It serves as a platform for discussing issues related to the design and implementation of evaluation plans. As all EU Member States are currently developing their own evaluation plans, this platform offers an online space where ongoing experiences can be shared, ideas can be exchanged and solutions can be sought to address challenges. Regular online meetings also provide a good source of inspiration and opportunities to identify similar approaches to evaluation planning and seeking support, when necessary. Contact evaluation@eucapnetwork.eu to find out more.

Slovakia's Managing Authority: "The Austrian experience is very inspiring for future preparation of the evaluation plan of our CAP Strategic Plan".

Greater stakeholder involvement key to evaluation plan success

- Joel Karlsson from Sweden's Managing Authority

With the new CAP extending its evaluation focus, there is a greater need to involve a broader range of stakeholders within the evaluation plan process, according to Joel Karlsson, head of the evaluation secretariat at Sweden's Managing Authority.

How has Sweden approached the development of its evaluation plan?

"The evaluation system in Sweden is quite stable and established, practically unchanged since 2013, which gives us a good 'team memory' with strong networks among key stakeholders in universities, agencies and ministries. This experience helped us prepare the evaluation plan by first focusing on its objectives, which helped us know what we wanted to achieve and shape more relevant evaluations for our target groups. We're already working on the first evaluations based on this approach, but it's too soon to share details."

What has this preparation taught you about assessing the next CAP?

"At the beginning of the process we didn't understand how important stakeholder consultations would be. We thought we could follow a similar approach to the past and hoped to finalise an engagement strategy quickly, but we soon learned that we need to include more groups and that's been a very interesting journey."

"Now we appreciate that the stakeholders involved will have a different role than the past, including groups that we have less experience engaging with, such as beneficiaries of direct payments. We need to start incorporating what their evaluation needs are and find new ways to add their voice to the discussion. Now we spend a lot of time thinking about how to reach target groups and build relationships."

What was the hardest aspect of developing Sweden's evaluation plan?

"The hardest part has been the identification of data needs because it's so complex. We needed a comprehensive understanding of what to evaluate and when, which needed broad knowledge on what data exists and what does not. We also need to formulate questions in our own IT systems based on this data, but we want



to first use available information first to limit administrative costs before searching for new sources [of data]. So those are some of the many complex parts to consider that take time to solve."

Which methods have helped Sweden overcome challenges when preparing their evaluation plan?

"The most important area is networking with other Managing Authorities to hear and see how other countries are preparing their evaluations. EvalPlatform (a space where Managing Authorities can exchange on CAP evaluation) has been great because it provided a lot of feedback and new ideas for us."

Do you have any advice for other Managing Authorities in developing their evaluation plans?

"I would suggest that they start off by thinking about what is the purpose of their evaluation plan - what are its objectives? What will it examine? Is it more operational or strategic? When you take this approach, then the necessary processes emerge and better results will follow - if you focus too much on good results and not enough on the process, then you won't get either."

Expert analysis reveals factors to help future biodiversity CAP evaluation

An in-depth appraisal of several biodiversity evaluations has revealed a range of practical advice for similar CAP evaluations in the future - thanks to a new 'Expert Insights' series prepared by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP.

The Evaluation Helpdesk has started a new series called 'Expert Insights', where accomplished evaluators examine studies from across the EU to identify best practices and practical advice to inspire future CAP assessments.

In the first edition, Professor Dimitris Skuras, an evaluator from Greece with 35 years of experience, examined six Rural Development Programme (RDP) evaluations from the 2014-2020 programming period and identified some practical advice for future CAP assessments on biodiversity.

"It is a huge challenge to assess the impacts of environmental conservation measures in agriculture considering the tremendous diversity of farming activities in different physical environments," said Prof. Skuras, adding that past evaluations are a great resource to reveal practical steps forward.

Prof. Skuras's Expert Insight explains that correctly framing the biodiversity evaluation mission is a strong place to start given that clearly setting an apprehensive spatio-temporal extent enables effective consideration of judgment criteria and their associated indicators. One way in which Prof. Skuras recommends doing this is by defining the terms used in the evaluation mandate and the judgment criteria to delineate the spatio-temporal extent of the study.

Another identified step towards success is around data and determining characteristics for the evaluation process, which captures the appropriate choice of the observation unit, the spatio-temporal coverage of the study, the ability to connect and use data stored in other databases, and the extent of data gaps along with the opportunity to fill them. The Expert Insight recommends several practical points to help evaluators and Managing Authorities, including extending the spatial and temporal coverage of evaluation data and linking this information



with the Integrated Administration and Control System (IACS)/Land Parcel Identification System (LPIS), national and EU environmental databases.

According to Prof. Skuras, evaluators can also forge a good path ahead by being bold when searching for a methodology most suited to the biodiversity data available, suggesting that they should not hesitate when it comes to proposing new approaches. Policy recommendations were a final step to consider, with the Greek evaluator suggesting that CAP evaluations on biodiversity record the lessons learned from the process and provide concrete proposals for the future design of such environmental policies.

To learn more, read the [full Expert Insights on biodiversity here](#).



1 - Belgium: [Effects of management agreements on populations of agricultural birds in Flanders \(2019\)](#)

2 - Finland: [Assessment of the significance of the RDP 2014-2020 of mainland Finland for biodiversity and the landscape \(2019\)](#)

3 - Germany: [RDP 2014-2020 of Lower Saxony and Bremen - Contributions to the evaluation of the Focus Area 4A Biodiversity \(2020\)](#)

4 - Germany: [Evaluation of biodiversity effects of ecological priority areas in Brandenburg \(2018\)](#)

5 - Latvia: [Impact of the Latvian RDP on Biodiversity - Botanical diversity of protected grassland habitats of EU importance](#)

6 - Slovakia: [Evaluation of the development of areas with high nature value on agricultural land \(2019\)](#)

How can National Networks help with future CAP monitoring and evaluation?

National Networks recently came together to explore how they can contribute to CAP monitoring and evaluation, with fostering an evaluation culture and crafting impactful narratives identified as key tools to success.

On 21-23 March, [the 1st National Networks Meeting](#) took place in Omiš, Croatia, where the networks discussed how they can meet their new objectives in the current CAP programming period, as defined by Art. 126 of [Regulation \(EU\) 2021/2115](#).

Organised by the EU CAP Network, the event included dedicated sessions to help National Networks with each objective, including workshops facilitated by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP on the need to “contribute to monitoring and evaluation capacity and activities”.

The Evaluation Helpdesk started the session by explaining how EU Member States' evaluation plans are a key tool to better define the new monitoring and evaluation mandate for each National Network, before an ad hoc survey showed that many networks were already heavily involved in EU Member States' evaluation plan design.

Afterwards, the networks shared evaluation lessons that they learnt from the last programming period that may help going forward. Several networks are planning to build upon successful activities such as interactive workshops with key stakeholders on disseminating evaluation findings and are preparing clear summaries of assessments to support more effective communication.

Participants also identified many challenges facing National Networks, such as developing the experience to address the extended scope within the new CAP, referring to the need to consider both rural development and direct payments and sectorial interventions. Other participants had questions about how to best develop engaging communication strategies that reach a broader audience – one that may contain many new stakeholders, such as farmers.

Discussions then focused on opportunities that National Networks have identified to help future CAP monitoring and evaluation



capacities and activities, which included fostering a better evaluation culture – one that involves all the needed stakeholders early on in the process. Participants explained that this could shape CAP evaluations that matter more to national stakeholders and help generate greater engagement in future assessments. Other participants added that this can be further complimented by crafting narratives that communicate impact in a way that is relevant to audiences beyond policymakers.

Finally, National Networks called upon the Evaluation Helpdesk to provide practical advice on how to develop tools that target new and existing stakeholders, along with ways to show them the value in participating in evaluations. They also emphasised that capacity building and peer learning events will remain very important as they provide the needed platform to share experiences on what communication and dissemination activities worked best and why.



Key outcomes

1. National Networks' involvement in evaluation activities ranged from modest to substantial
2. There are concerns about the necessary resources and capacities needed to contribute to effective monitoring and evaluation
3. Networks can empower evaluation cultures by providing training sessions and making results more visible
4. Evaluation plans can help clarify the role of National Networks in future monitoring and evaluation

Study on EU school schemes showed increase healthy food intake

An evaluation of the EU school fruit, vegetables and milk scheme found that almost 15% more children benefitted from a more varied supply of healthy and fresh EU agri-products from 2017-18 to 2020-21.

In November 2022, the European Commission published an evaluation support study carried out by Agrosynergie assessing the EU School Scheme, which provided fresh vegetables, fruit and milk to more than 15 million children in 2020-2021. During the evaluation period, the study found that the share of EU children benefitting from the scheme increased from 40.2% in 2017-18 to 54.6% in 2020-21, alongside a rise in the number of different healthy products distributed to schools.

The evaluation support study was designed around a range of methods and tools for collecting and analysing the quantitative and qualitative data to answer 12 evaluation questions, including data from each regional and national EU school scheme, annual monitoring reports as well as in-depth interviews and surveys.

The report concluded that the existing scheme fulfils its main objectives of increasing children's consumption of selected agricultural products and improving their eating habits, but also signalled that participation in the fruit and vegetable scheme fell



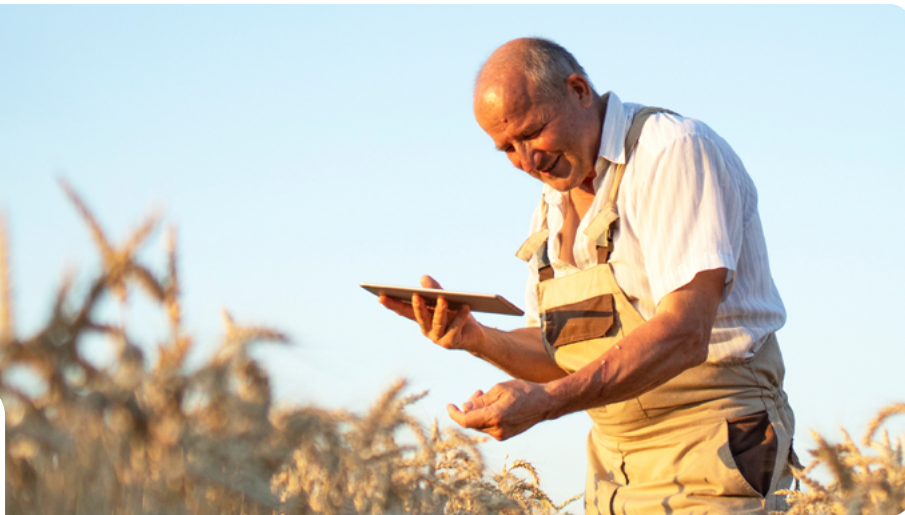
NETWORKING

during the Covid-19 pandemic, while uptake of the milk scheme has been gradually declining long before the coronavirus outbreak. The evaluators concluded that better results could be achieved in the future if education professionals and families were more involved.

The report's findings will now contribute to an ongoing review of the EU school schemes, which was announced as part of the Farm to Fork Strategy, the Commission's plan to make the bloc's food system more sustainable.

Evaluation Reading Corner

- > [Biodiversity Indicators for Result-based Agri-environmental Schemes: an Overview](#)
Agroscope ETH-Zurich
- > [Community-Led Local Development The added-value of cross-border local development in the Interreg Italy - Austria Programme 2014-2020](#)
European Commission
- > [Indicators and thresholds for soil health assessments](#)
European Environmental Agency
- > [Evaluation for action. Assessing animal disease surveillance capacities](#)
UN Food and Agriculture Organisation
- > [Mercury in European topsoils: Anthropogenic sources, stocks and fluxes](#)
EU Joint Research Centre (JRC)
- > [An assessment of the labour and skills shortages in agriculture and the food sector](#)
Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2023)

**GET INVOLVED**

Do you know of any interesting evaluation projects, events, publications or other initiatives?

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

Events Calendar

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



8-9 June 2023 - [Addressing data gaps to evaluate CAP Strategic Plans](#)



19-22 June 2023 - [International Symposium on Transportation Data & Modelling](#)



10-13 July 2023 - [Sustainability transitions of agriculture and the transformation of education and advisory services: convergence or divergence?](#)



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

European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP



Rue Belliard 12,
1040 Brussels, Belgium



evaluation@eucapnetwork.eu



[Website](#)



+32 2 808 10 24

Newsletter Editorial Team: Steve Gillman, Hannes Wimmer

Contributors: Costas Apostolopoulos, Carina Folkeson, Julia Gallardo Gómez, Steve Gillman, Dimitris Skuras, Valdis Kudins, Marili Parissaki, Jules Vincent

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