

# EU CAP Network Magazine

Facilitating the implementation and evaluation of CAP Strategic Plans while promoting knowledge sharing, capacity building and cooperation



European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP

06



Innovation and knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI

08



CAP Implementation Contact Point

10



#Bloomtogether - Showcasing stakeholders like you

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# Introduction

Welcome to the first issue of the EU CAP Network magazine.

The EU CAP Network's mission is to optimise the flow of information about agriculture and rural policy within the EU. It serves as a forum for discussion and exchange of good practices for a wide variety of stakeholders, including Member State administrations, agricultural producers, evaluators, local action groups, European organisations, farm advisory services providers, innovation support services and more.

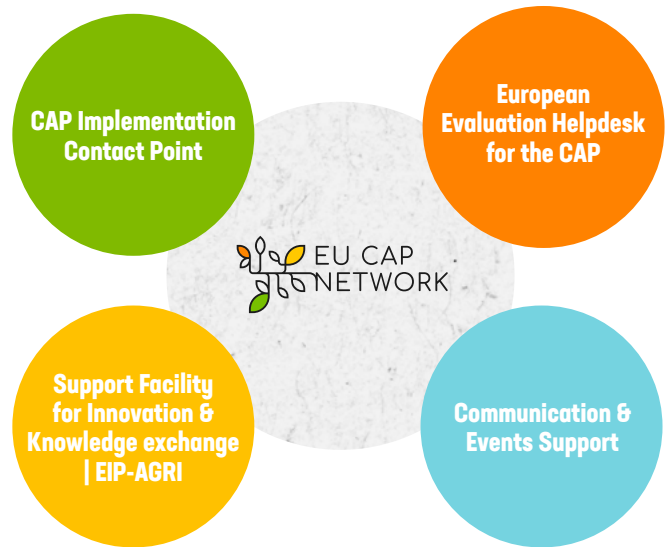
The Network supports **the design and implementation of CAP strategic plans, innovation and knowledge exchange, including EIP-AGRI, and evaluation and monitoring of the CAP.**

This publication highlights the broad range of activities of the Network since its launch in October 2022, both for stakeholders and everyone interested in the implementation, innovation and evaluation related to CAP.

To assist the stakeholders of the EU CAP Network, four support units work behind the scenes to organise and facilitate meetings and exchanges between Network's stakeholders, as well as to produce and disseminate content about the activities of the Network.

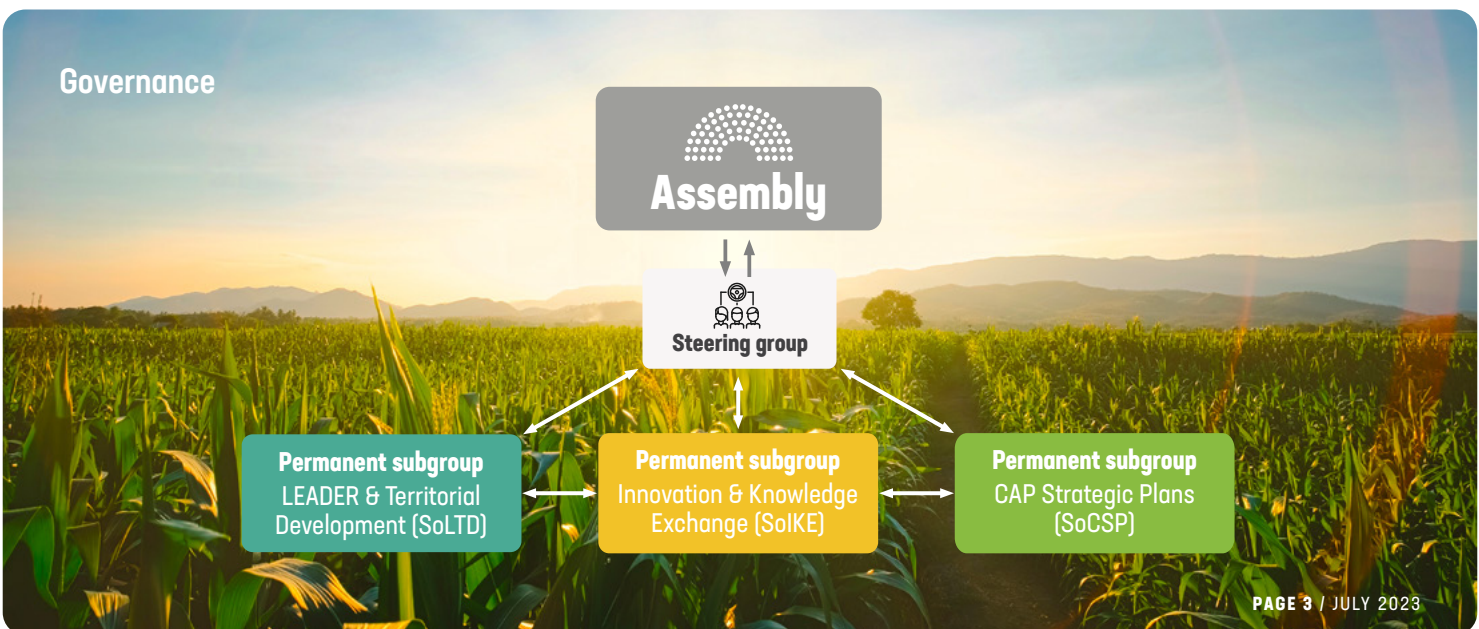
**The CAP Implementation Contact Point** supports and coordinates networking activities among stakeholders related to the design and implementation of CAP strategic plans. It's aim is to engage and connect Network stakeholders to exchange ideas, experiences, and inspirations, and then share the outcomes of these exchanges.

**The Support Facility for Innovation and Knowledge Exchange, including EIP-AGRI** facilitates exchange of knowledge and cooperation between stakeholders interested in sharing good practices and innovating for sustainable agriculture, forestry, and rural areas. It connects research to practice and supports implementation of the European Innovation Partnership for productivity and sustainability (EIP-AGRI).



**The European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP** ensures the effectiveness of CAP evaluations by supporting managing authorities, national CAP networks, paying agencies, evaluators, and the European Commission in a wide range of related needs. They offer many avenues of support, including planning and assessing CAP monitoring, strengthening the abilities of CAP evaluators, offering networking opportunities, and publications on evaluation and best practices.

The EU CAP Network also includes a dedicated team in charge of **Communication and Events support**. This team oversees the logistical organisation and production of events, as well as the coordination and dissemination of communication products showcasing the Network's events, actions, and publications. These communication activities provide important information to the EU CAP Network stakeholders, thus promoting and facilitating knowledge exchange.



*“Working together, supporting and learning from each other is crucial, and this is the main role of the EU CAP Network.”*

WOLFGANG BURTSCHER



# OP-ED

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is one of the longest-serving EU policies. The policy's original objectives, which were already established in 1957 in the Treaty of Rome, have remained unchanged since then: increasing productivity, stabilising markets, providing fair living standards to farmers, and ensuring the availability of food at reasonable prices.

Today we live in a constantly changing world where these objectives are as important as ever and they continue to respond to new challenges that we are facing. Over the past years there has been no shortage of such challenges. First the COVID pandemic, then the Russia's brutal war against Ukraine disrupted important trade flows and markets. Agricultural production is being increasingly impacted by extreme weather conditions, the rising input costs and food security concerns. Extreme weather events also affect rural communities with environmental, social and economic impact, widening the gap between rural and urban areas.

Supporting farm income, generational renewal, access to knowledge, technology and promoting environmentally sustainable farming, greater input efficiency and preservation of natural resources thus remain crucial under the new CAP for the 2023 - 2027 period, which entered into force on 1 January 2023.

CAP is a key instrument that provides EU Member States with the means to reward, through their CAP Strategic Plans, the sustainable actions of farmers and other rural operators, with eco-schemes and rural development funding that protect the climate and the environment - water, soil, air and biodiversity while supporting resilience, productivity and profitability of farming activities.

CAP Strategic Plans also help rural areas address challenges identified in the Long-term vision for EU's rural areas, including depopulation, access to and improvement of basic services, opportunities for employment and solutions related to connectivity.



**WOLFGANG BURTSCHER**

Director General  
Directorate-General for Agriculture and  
Rural Development, European Commission

To address these sustainability challenges while keeping the sector's competitiveness and preserving rural areas, we need to change our practices and to innovate. Advancing research, knowledge-sharing, and innovation is essential for securing a smart and sustainable agricultural sector. The new CAP supports stronger agricultural knowledge and innovation systems (AKIS) to boost the development of innovation projects, disseminate their results, and encourage their use as widely as possible.

For all these reasons, working together, supporting and learning from each other is crucial, and this is the main role of the EU CAP Network, launched in October 2022, under the new CAP.

Networking at the EU level builds on the experience and knowledge created by the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) including the Evaluation Helpdesk and EIP-AGRI network in the previous programming period. With the strategic approach of the new CAP, encompassing all the CAP-related and CAP-funded instruments, the role of the networking at the EU level becomes even more important by bringing together EU Member States and various stakeholders to share their good practices, experience and progress, but also their know-how in facing all type of constraints and challenges. The EU CAP Network is aiming to assure streamlined support in implementing the new CAP and Strategic Plans, as well as other priorities defined by the Farm to Fork and Biodiversity strategies, Green Deal and Long-term vision for rural areas. Its strength is in involvement of many stakeholders who contribute with their knowledge-sharing and with identifying needs for further exchanges and mutual support.

This first edition of the EU CAP Network magazine brings the rich content, presenting thematic strands of the network - CAP implementation, innovation and evaluation - and its various tools and services at your disposal, but also benefits of being involved in networking as shared by several stakeholders. I hope you will enjoy reading their stories.



ACTIVITIES & SERVICES

# European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP

## Empowering evaluations with the EU CAP Network

The new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) cycle is in full swing, with the Evaluation Helpdesk ready to provide the monitoring and evaluation support needed at every step of the way.

The CAP for the 2023-27 period aims to shift EU Member States away from compliance and more towards results, a path that will be shaped by new monitoring and evaluation expectations for many EU CAP Network stakeholders - from Managing Authorities to Paying Agencies and from National Networks to evaluators.

While these stakeholders already possess vast experience in evaluating Rural Development Programmes (RDP) and their interventions, they may face new and challenging aspects throughout the 2023-27 period. Nevertheless, support is available at every step of the way with the Evaluation Helpdesk's range of publications, online resources, workshops, trainings and guidance. For starters, many EU Member States have embarked on developing their 'evaluation plan' for 2023-27, which is a living document that aligns assessments around objectives based on the country's requirements and the new **CAP's monitoring and evaluation framework**.

The Evaluation Helpdesk has already **prepared guidelines** to support EU countries in drafting this document and organised two of this year's Good Practice Workshops to further support this process - from **developing an effective plan in the first place** to identifying data gaps.

These evaluation plans will also empower EU Member States to better demonstrate the CAP's impact while giving national stakeholders greater flexibility to design their assessments for the 2023-27 programming period - with the Evaluation Helpdesk providing tailored support in the coming years as needs emerge. For example, recent **Thematic Working Groups** have focused on developing tools and guidance to help the EU CAP Network successfully take on new challenges, from setting evaluation factors of success to identifying and filling data gaps, as well as practical approaches to assessing topics like **AKIS, animal welfare** and direct payments.





Many capacity building and training events are also organised each year on in-demand, specific or general topics - all with the goal to enhance the EU CAP Network's monitoring and evaluation knowledge and skills. EvaluationWORKS! and EvalPLATFORM! will continue to offer a forum for learning and exchange in each EU Member State while EvaluationPEERS! allows Managing Authorities to come together and exchange best evaluation practices, or discuss future challenges and ways to overcome them.

Online resources from the Evaluation Helpdesk will provide additional inspiration for upcoming evaluations with a 'Catalogue of CAP interventions' offering an easy way to browse through EU Member States's CAP Strategic Plan interventions and enable future analyses by government officials, farmers, civil society or researchers. Another online resource is a training repository for the EU CAP Network website, which will serve as a valuable reference for evaluation stakeholders to learn and upskill on a range of practices and topics.

The Evaluation Helpdesk is also collaborating with some of Europe's most experienced evaluators to create 'CAP Evaluation Expert Insights', which transform specialist knowledge in a given area into a collection of practical tips that can help others overcome common monitoring and evaluation challenges.

Underpinning all this support will be a range of communication and dissemination activities, such as regular issues of **CAP Evaluation News**, a **database** where EU Member States' evaluations will be collected, an Evaluation Knowledge Bank showcasing useful tools and practices, and much, much more.



Any question on CAP monitoring and evaluation?  
Get in touch with the Evaluation Helpdesk by contacting  
[evaluation@eucapnetwork.eu](mailto:evaluation@eucapnetwork.eu)



 **ACTIVITIES & SERVICES**

# Innovation and knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI

**To speed up innovation in agriculture, forestry and rural areas, it is essential to build up efficient flows of knowledge between EU Member States. In this context, the 'Innovation and knowledge exchange including EIP-AGRI' strand of the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) Network plays a key role in connecting farmers, foresters, advisors, researchers, business representatives, environmental groups, consumer interest groups, NGOs and other innovators across Europe.**

In its activities and services, the 'Support Facility for Innovation and Knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI' covers all nine specific CAP 2023-2027 objectives as well as the cross-cutting objective of modernising agriculture and rural areas by fostering and sharing knowledge, innovation and digitalisation. Pacôme Elouna Eyenga, Team leader at the EIP-AGRI Support Facility, explains: "We stimulate strong Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) by bridging practice and research. The CAP objectives feed into the relevant key strategic orientations of European Research and Innovation, addressing topics such as ecosystem and biodiversity, clean water, air and soil, climate change, sustainable food systems and the circular economy."

EIP-AGRI Operational Groups, which are supported through the 2023-2027 CAP Strategic Plans - previously through Rural Development Programmes - turn innovative ideas into practical solutions. They benefit considerably from knowledge exchange with multi-actor projects funded through the Horizon Europe (previously Horizon 2020) research programme. Horizon projects are in turn encouraged to connect with Operational Groups to develop innovative solutions that cover real needs and are more likely to be taken up in practice.

***"It is our role to connect research with practice. We facilitate communication and cooperation between everyone with a keen interest in sharing knowledge and innovative ideas, contributing to more sustainability and productivity in European agriculture, forestry and rural areas."***

**PACÔME ELOUNA EYENGA**





## The 'Support Facility for Innovation and Knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI':



Identifies synergies and stimulates **collaboration between projects.**



**Shares innovation** through publications, videos, social media and press.



**Organises networking activities** to foster knowledge exchange, including workshops, seminars, field visits, brokerage activities and expert Focus Groups.



**Answers questions through a helpdesk.**



The topics of EIP-AGRI Support Facility's networking activities are closely linked to the CAP objectives and the EU Research and Innovation priorities. More than ten events on innovation and knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI were held in the first half of 2023, with topics ranging from animal health and food security in the context of climate change to social farming.

→ **[Watch the video to find out more.](#)**

## Inspiration from innovators

The EIP-AGRI Support Facility shares inspiring stories from innovators in the EU CAP Network.



### Smart circular farming in Malta

Three cooperatives in Malta have teamed up to recycle nutrients from livestock manure and to use them as fertiliser in the fruit and vegetable sector. More information on smart circular farming to address high energy and fertiliser prices can be found on the webpage of the dedicated EU CAP Network workshop.

→ **[More information on the seminar webpage.](#)**



### Strip-till and strip-plant methods to improve soil fertility in Germany

German Operational Group BioStripPlant is testing the use of strip-till and strip-plant methods to improve the fertility of soils in organic market gardening. More information on soil health can be found on the website.

→ **[More information on the soil health webpage.](#)**



### Integrating advisors in the Slovenian AKIS

In Slovenia, field advisors work closely together with specialist advisors and coordinating advisors to build up efficient knowledge flow systems. More AKIS inspiration can be found in the dedicated brochure.

→ **[More information in the AKIS brochures.](#)**



ACTIVITIES & SERVICES

# CAP Implementation Contact Point

## What we do

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) Implementation Contact Point (CAPI CP) supports and coordinates networking activities relating to the design and implementation of the CAP Strategic Plans. We do this first and foremost by connecting people, encouraging colleagues from across Europe to learn from one another, exchanging their experiences, their aspirations and their inspirations.

Among other activities, we facilitate peer-to-peer learning and exchanges between national, regional and local stakeholders and EU institutions. We do this through networking meetings for National Networks, thematic workshops and seminars, and five Thematic Groups (TGs) per year.

Our three first TGs in 2023 focused on rural youth employment, forest-dominant rural areas and CAP Strategic Plans: towards implementation. Two new TGs will be launched in the Autumn - keep an eye on our [website](#) and social media to learn more and express your interest in joining them!

Our publications and good practice database help us share knowledge and information about the implementation of the CAP across the EU.

The database shows how the CAP is supporting farmers, foresters and rural communities across the EU - in practice - through the EAFRD (European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development) and the EAGF (European Agricultural Guarantee Fund).

Selected good practices are collected in our [Projects Brochures](#) (two per year), while our new [Policy Insights articles](#) explore key CAP-related topics, ranging from the CAP's support to rural youth, to food chains.

In terms of novelties, LEADER enthusiasts will appreciate our new [LEADER newsletter](#), launched in March, which gathers inspiring stories and useful knowledge about rural Europe's favourite local development programme.



Last but not least, in 2023 we're taking our well-known Rural Inspiration Awards to the next level: [ARIA - the Agricultural and Rural Inspiration Awards](#) competition will highlight project success stories that both support innovation in agriculture and rural areas and make a contribution to the CAP's environmental and climate change objectives and towards increasing digital usage.

Follow our social media campaign (#ARIAwards23) next autumn to find out the finalists, vote for your favourite project and follow our exciting award ceremony.



**Learn more about all our activities on the EU CAP Network website!**



## Who is the CAPI CP for?

**Our networking activities relating to the design and implementation of the CAP Strategic Plans target all CAP stakeholders. Our direct stakeholders are National Networks and National Support Units, Managing Authorities and Paying Agencies in all EU Member States, as well as LEADER Local Action Groups (LAGs).**

As work has expanded to encompass both Pillars of the CAP, we have already welcomed some 'new faces', including representatives of the farming and forestry community, namely through our Thematic Groups. Find out more on [page 18](#) and keep following us - we look forward to involving as many people as possible in this exciting new phase!



We also work with non-governmental organisations with a broad range of priorities and specific interests in relation to all three General Objectives (GO) of the CAP: fostering a smart, competitive, resilient and diversified agricultural sector ensuring long-term food security, sustainable management of natural resources and climate action, and strengthening the socio-economic fabric in rural areas.

Some of our activities, including communications and publications, target a wider audience. You can read more about this on [page 12](#).



## Meet the team!

Based in Brussels, we are a friendly and enthusiastic team made up of experienced policy experts, network facilitators and communicators with different backgrounds, covering the agriculture, food, rural development and environment and climate sectors.

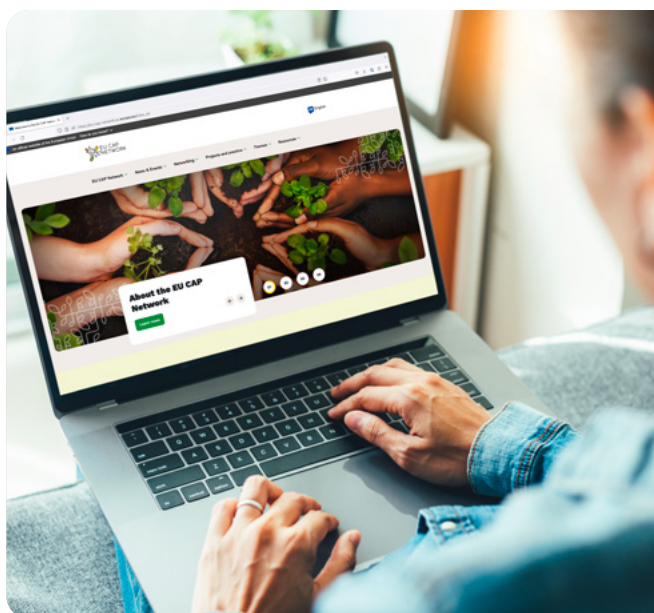
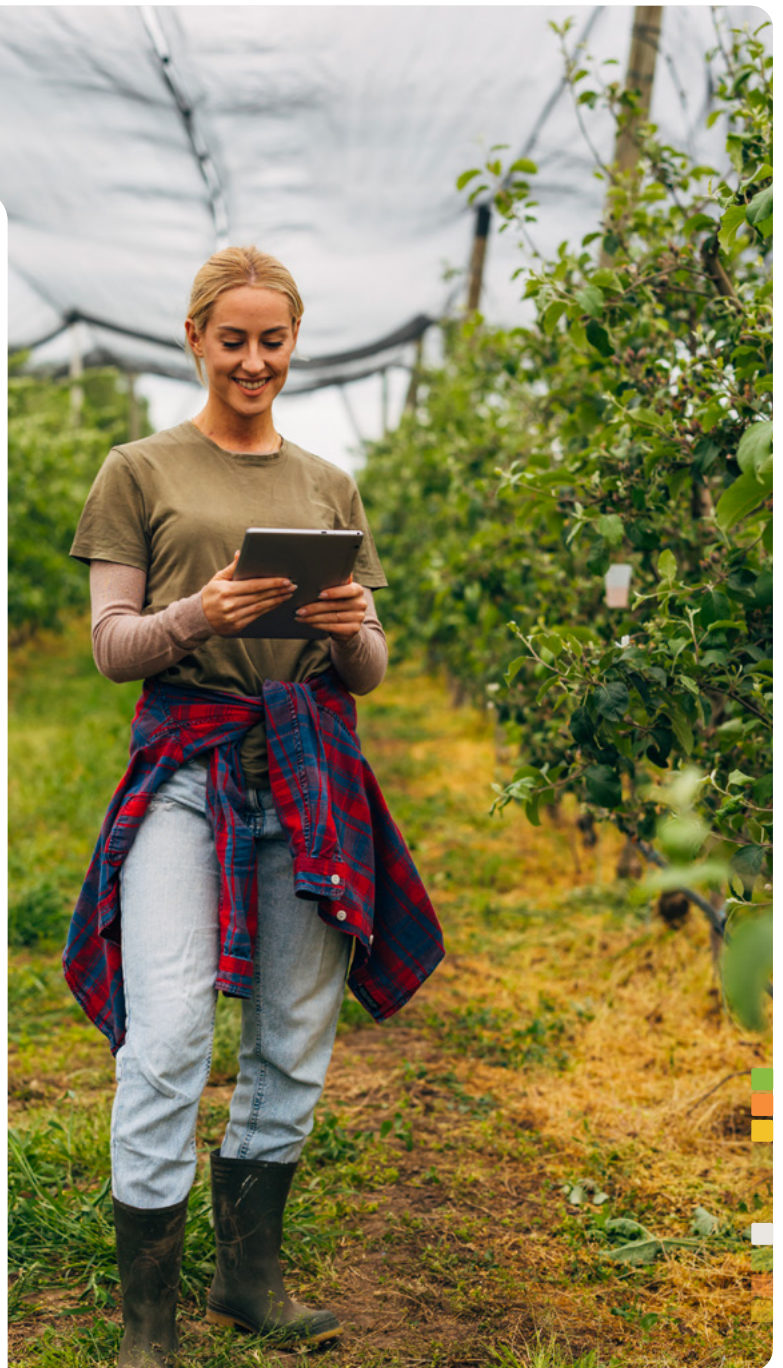
Led by the committed duo made up of David Lamb (Team Leader) and Susan Grieve (Deputy Team Leader), the CAPI CP staff work in dynamic mini-teams to ensure that all our activities (networking, knowledge development and communication) feed into each other.

→ **[Browse the EU CAP Network website to meet the Team!](#)**

ACTIVITIES & SERVICES

# Communication activities within the EU CAP Network

Since the EU CAP Network's launch in October 2022, there has been lots to talk about. Discover how you can follow our communication activities to stay informed about what is going on in the Network across the 27 EU Member States.



## Website

In our new website we share news articles and publications about the EU CAP Network's activities, upcoming events, and other insightful material. Its new look and feel and more user-friendly interface allow visitors to browse different topics easily and stay informed about the issues and matters that interest them the most in agriculture, farming, rural development and many more related fields.

→ [eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu](https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu)



## Publications

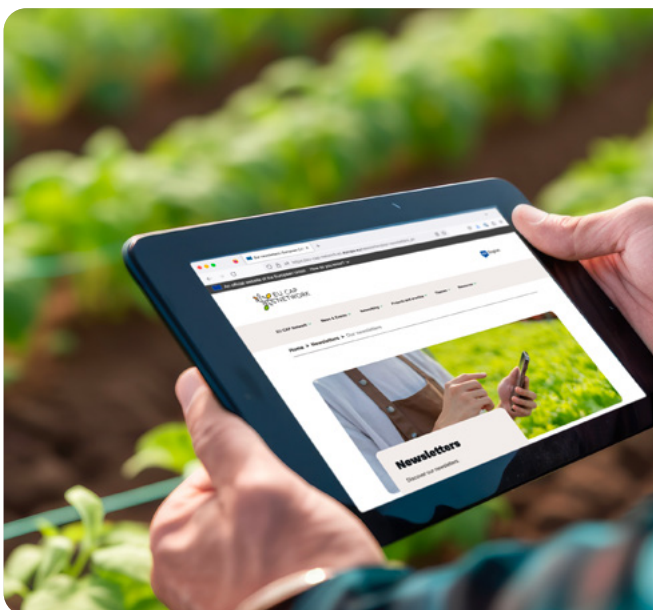
The EU CAP Network also produces a series of insightful publications on a wide variety of topics. Highlight Reports from previous events, Policy Insights, good practices, press articles, and many more interesting reads are also available in our website.

→ [Search publications](#)



## Social Media

You can also follow more closely our activities on the EU CAP Network's social media, where we share information and updates about current and upcoming events, publications, and other initiatives on a daily basis. We invite you to follow the EU CAP Network on Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook so that you don't miss a thing.



## Newsletters

Additionally, whether you are interested in innovation, evaluation, or LEADER, or if you just want to be informed about the Network's activities more broadly, we have a newsletter tailored to your taste. Our EU CAP Network newsletter and our Innovation and Knowledge Exchange|EIP-AGRI newsletter are mailed out monthly, whereas all LEADER-related updates are featured quarterly in our LEADER Newsletter. Those interested in CAP evaluation and monitoring will surely enjoy reading the issues of CAP Evaluation News. All our newsletters are available in English, French and German, so you can subscribe and read them in your language of choice.

→ [Subscribe to EU CAP Network newsletters](#)

STAKEHOLDER INPUT

# Evaluation

## Insights from the EU CAP Network on making the most of the Evaluation Helpdesk

The European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP offers a range of support, from online resources to guidelines and capacity building events. Here, different stakeholders of the EU CAP Network share how this support can help their CAP monitoring and evaluation in the coming programming period.

Camelia Popescu, from the Romanian Managing Authority, on how EvaluationPeers!, a capacity building event, helped with their future CAP evaluations:

*“Our biggest take away point from the peer-learning event was that a close cooperation with research institutes is necessary to provide useful data and solutions.”*

Sophie Helaine, Head of the European Commission's Unit for CAP Monitoring and Evaluation, on how the Evaluation Helpdesk is a valuable resource of expert knowledge for the EU CAP Network:

*“EU 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, are disseminated through the Evaluation Helpdesk.”*

Joel Karlsson from Sweden's Managing Authority on how EvalPLATFORM provided the chance to network with other Managing Authorities and learn how they prepare their CAP evaluations.

*“EvalPLATFORM has been great because it provided a lot of feedback and new ideas for us.”*

Paula Kurvits from Estonia's Ministry of Rural Affairs on how she used the **evaluation plan guidelines**:

*“They have been very useful to check if our understanding of the Implementing Regulation is the same as the guidelines, which means we can check if our evaluation plan already addresses the required criteria and then consider what additional factors could be helpful to include.”*



Andreas Resch, an Austrian evaluator, on how national capacity building events create new communication channels between CAP evaluation stakeholders:

*“The yearly Evaluation Helpdesk capacity building workshop provided a very good, almost unique, platform for an exchange between technical departments and evaluators.”*



## Collaborating to enhance CAP evaluations across the EU

Niamh Hamilton Jones from the Irish Government's Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine explains how a Good Practice Workshop gave her the opportunity to network with other EU Member States and identify best practices when it comes to charting Ireland's future Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) evaluations.

EU Member States are required to conduct CAP evaluations before, during and after the 2023-27 implementation period, with these assessments determining how each country contributed to the agricultural and rural development policy's objectives - a journey mapped out with an evaluation plan.

Niamh Hamilton Jones, from the Irish Government's Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, recently took part in a Good Practice Workshop in Prague, Czechia, on **designing good evaluation plans** and explains how the Evaluation Helpdesk's event provided the opportunity to network with other countries and discuss best practices for developing an effective plan for Ireland.

"The Good Practice Workshop was very useful. It was interesting to hear the different approaches other EU Member States are taking and then following up with questions in person," said Niamh. "We've gotten a lot of pointers from a lot of different countries."

Networking is an essential part of any Good Practice Workshop, with EU Member States encouraged to discuss and share their challenges before exploring practical solutions on pathways ahead, something which Niamh says helped Ireland overcome a specific evaluation issue they were facing.

"Our biggest challenge is the evaluation criteria," said Niamh, adding that the workshop revealed that many other countries are also struggling to decide when to evaluate the different criteria and how.

The evaluation criteria in question refers to five factors that EU Member States must address throughout their 2023-27 assessments, such as 'relevance', which examines if an intervention is doing the right thing, and 'effectiveness', which focuses on whether a measure is achieving certain objectives. The other three are 'coherence', 'efficiency' and 'EU added value'.

*"At the workshop, it seemed like a lot of us were focusing on effectiveness and less so on the other four criteria, but after listening to Denmark discuss how they intend to look at the other criteria, and speaking to them personally, it gave us a few ideas and that's been very helpful."*



**NIAMH HAMILTON JONES**  
Irish Government's Department  
of Agriculture

STAKEHOLDER INPUT  
**Innovation**

## Sparking innovation across Europe

Within the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) Network, 'Innovation and knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI' builds on the work that the former EIP-AGRI Network started in 2014. For nine years, the EIP-AGRI Network has been connecting farmers, foresters, advisors, rural entrepreneurs, researchers and other innovators across the EU in order to speed up innovation and bridge the gap between practice and research. Many of them now count on the EU CAP Network to help them overcome agricultural, forestry or rural challenges.



### *"Getting out of our bubbles"*



**KIRSTEN WOSNITZA**  
Dairy farmer - Germany

Taking part in the EIP-AGRI Focus Group on robust and resilient dairy farming has given me a different perspective, through discussions with researchers, advisors and other dairy farmers. They helped me improve the grazing systems on my own farm.

As farmers, scientists or advisors, we have to get out of our 'bubble' and discuss with other bubbles to share experiences and knowledge. As farmers, this will allow us to make sure that we get the innovation we really need on our farms.

In the past, we've faced periods with too much rain or no rain at all when we needed it. We really need to learn how to deal with climate change, how to keep our water clean and our soils fertile and how to get animal welfare in our barns. I'm very happy that we have Operational Groups (OGs) dealing with these challenges. I hope that they will help bring innovation to our farms, to make us more robust and resilient as European dairy farmers.

### *"Working with people from different backgrounds has been very fruitful"*



**MARKO MÄKI-HAKOLA**  
Finland - Advisor

In the EIP-AGRI Network, I have met over a thousand people. It is nice to have old friends, but new friends can give you fresh ideas. By participating in innovation work, I've been able to spread information about innovation in forestry and agriculture widely.

My biggest challenge was to help our farmers, forest owners and rural entrepreneurs increase profitability and find new income streams. Now there are many new challenges. Through its events, the EU CAP Network could help people understand the importance of the circular economy based on a sustainable bioeconomy, focusing, for example, on how to move from fossil energy to renewable energy based on forestry and agriculture.





*“Exchanging experiences with other countries”*



**ELS LAPAGE**  
Belgium - Managing Authority

The EIP-AGRI Network gave me ideas on how to improve the bottom-up approach of EIP-AGRI projects. As a result, farmers have been more closely involved in OGs and results have been applied in the field more speedily. During inspiring EIP-AGRI events I met Managing Authorities from other countries. Afterwards, we organised networking activities where OGs from Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands met. We exchanged information and experiences on good practices to implement in our own countries.

Flanders is now facing new challenges, such as the circular economy, climate change and improving farm resilience. Knowledge exchange and innovation is key in this respect. The EU CAP Network could promote bringing together different types of experts involved in OGs dealing with these topics to learn from each other.

*“Implementing innovative ideas on farms and agricultural lands”*



**LAIMA TAPARAUSKIENE**  
Lithuania - Researcher

I have met many supportive and creative people in the EIP-AGRI Network. They were all open to sharing their knowledge and experience, looking for strategies to achieve more competitive and sustainable farming and forestry.

By working in an OG on climate resilience, we succeeded in transferring scientific findings into innovative solutions by focusing on smart drainage systems and by preparing recommendations to reconstruct such systems. The EIP-AGRI Network helped me make full use of the power of cooperation between multiple actors.

We now face huge challenges regarding climate change and water scarcity, and the sustainable development of regions. We also need to think more widely about innovative approaches. But the biggest challenge is to avoid repetition. The EU CAP Network can help us use this knowledge in an efficient way, closing the gap between generating knowledge and applying innovative solutions across Europe.



## STAKEHOLDER INPUT

# CAP Implementation

**Zorana-Ana Cetinić-Frankos**, Head of Department at the National Network in Croatia, recalls her experiences with the previous European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) and shares her views and expectations for the EU CAP Network.



**ZORANA-ANA  
CETINIĆ-FRANKOS**

### What were your experiences with the ENRD?

**Zorana-Ana Cetinić-Frankos:** “The Croatian National Rural Network initially joined the ENRD as an observer from a pre-accession country. Our full participation started in 2013, when Croatia joined the EU. Although we are a very small network, we actively participated in most ENRD activities, especially since 2019 when the Network National Support Unit (NSU) became a stand-alone Department within the Ministry of Agriculture and took over a more active role in the 2014-2020 Rural Development Programme.

Networking with the ENRD definitely widened my perspective: I’ve gained new insights into the cultures and heritage of other EU Member States, as well as into different types of existing rural networks. I’ve learned a lot about networking in general, facilitation of events and collaboration.



It was crucial to see how other networks operate, to gather valuable information and to apply some of their modus operandi within our own network. We try to apply what we’ve learnt and discussed with our colleagues, even if our networks and the contexts we operate in can be very different. We do our best to improve.”

### Tell us about a personal experience linked to European networking.

**Zorana-Ana Cetinić-Frankos:** “I can still remember my first NRN meeting, in June 2019, in Romania. What astonished me was how friendly everyone was: my colleague and I had just joined the NSU and we were welcomed as if we had always been part of the ‘networking crowd’.

Fast forward to 2023: our small team co-hosted the first meeting ever held in Croatia, which was also the very first meeting of the new **National Networks**. How’s that for an accomplishment! We already had great cooperation with the CAPI CP team, and after this co-hosting experience I feel like we became a true networking family.”

### What are your hopes/expectations for the new EU CAP Network?

**Zorana-Ana Cetinić-Frankos:** “I believe it will take a little time for the EU CAP Network to function as a well-oiled machine, which is perfectly natural. Individually, the three units are excellent resources and I believe that, by working together as one network, they can be even stronger in building the future of networking.”



MARIEKE SCHALK

## HofladenBOX

Marieke Schalk and her friend Birgit Wegner were keen on buying food from small producers in their district in Bavaria (southern Germany), but it was difficult with the little time they had at the end of any working day.

In 2017, they decided to develop an online marketplace for local food producers. With the support of LEADER funding, their project is now a successful business. HofladenBOX enables customers to buy local products from some 60 small farmers, butchers and bakeries and have the products delivered at home or at 40 pick-up points twice a week. The project now employs over 20 people, including Marieke, who left her job as a financial consultant. It supports local agri-food production and helps reduce CO2 emissions whilst making hundreds of local customers happy.

HofladenBOX won the **2021 Rural Inspiration Awards** in the category 'Digital futures'. We asked Marieke to tell us about her experience.

**What would be your advice to somebody thinking about leaving their job, as you did, to set up this kind of company?**

**Marieke Schalk:** "Be courageous and do it! That would be my advice. But also be aware of a couple of basic things. First of all, your region needs to be big enough - you need about one million potential customers. You will also need some money to set up an IT system, to hire people, to rent a storage location or a repackaging location. You need to be able to cover these costs for the first year or two. But apart from that, I can encourage everybody to do that and to start building your network with local producers. Make sure that the customers are interested and that there are enough customers around. But then, go ahead!"

**How can the CAP network help this?**

**Marieke Schalk:** "I think that the EU CAP Network is really an opportunity to share success stories. It can be a platform where people can look for similar experiences and get in contact with people who have already done things that are similar to those that they want to do. So I'm very happy that this network exists and enables us all to share our experience."

→ **Listen to Marieke's story in the first episode of the EU CAP Network's #Bloomcast**



STAKEHOLDER INPUT  
**#Bloomtogether**



## The campaign showcasing stakeholders like you

Stakeholders are the core of the EU CAP Network. The #Bloomtogether campaign presents the wide variety of individuals conforming the Network and places them in the spotlight to put forward the added value of their work.

### Watch the #Bloomtogether video series

Behind each stakeholder there is a story to be told. Meet them in the #Bloomtogether video series to discover their experiences as part of the EU CAP Network and their hopes for the future. In the first three episodes, Donal Sheehan, Gabriela Michail and Pedro Serrano sat with us and shared more about their work in different fields related to agriculture and farming, their involvement with the Network and their views on how it could be shaped in years to come.



**DONAL SHEEHAN**

Donal is an Irish dairy farmer involved in an EIP-AGRI Operational Group. **Watch Donal Sheehan.**



**PEDRO SERRANO**

Pedro is an agronomy engineer involved with the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP as a geographic expert for Portugal. **Watch Pedro Serrano.**




**GABRIELA MICHAIL**

Gabriela is the former Head of the Networking and Publicity Unit at the Managing Authority of the CAP Strategic Plan. **Watch Gabriela Michail.**

## The #Bloomcast: in conversation with stakeholders

The EU CAP Network is ripe with excellent sources of knowledge from across the EU. The #Bloomcast series is a series of episodes featuring different EU CAP Network stakeholders who discuss about specific matters.

In the first three episodes, we sat down with business owners, focus group experts, members of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development and other stakeholders to discuss about short food supply chains, soil health and CAP monitoring and evaluation.



**#Bloomcast**

**Watch these insightful conversations on the EU CAP Network's YouTube channel.**



### Follow along, and bloom in the EU CAP Network

Collaborating, exchanging, and sharing knowledge is what the EU CAP Network is all about. Do you want to #Bloomtogether with other stakeholders?

**Visit our website and follow the EU CAP Network on social media to stay tuned about upcoming events, news and publications!**



## NEW VOICES Get involved

Since 6 October 2022, ENRD has become part of the new European CAP Network under the name CAP Implementation Contact Point (CAPI CP). Our work on EU funding for agriculture and rural development, which has been our focus since 2008, has now expanded to cover the full breadth of the Common Agricultural Policy. Expanding our work to encompass both Pillars of the CAP, we now enjoy the opportunity to involve 'new faces' in our work - particularly stakeholders from the agri-food sector.

**Esther Ontiveros Olmedo** is in charge of communications and social responsibility at DCOOP, one of the largest cooperative groups worldwide, which brings together 130 cooperatives across Spain and Portugal, for a total of around 75 000 small and medium size producers. Esther was an active member of our Thematic Group (TG) on **Sustainability Agreements in the agri-food supply chain**, organised in spring 2022.



**ESTHER ONTIVEROS  
OLMEDO**

**You participated in one of the first Thematic Groups organised by the EU CAP Network. What did this experience mean to you?**

We were able to share our strategy to strengthen the position of farmers in the organic food supply chain with other companies. The analysis of DCOOP as a successful **case study** has helped us realise how others see us and focus on our strengths to contribute to the sustainability of food production.

DCOOP shared its approach to giving value to the by-products of the agricultural and livestock activity through circular economy and I+D [innovation and development] projects. We also learned from the experience of other companies. We have taken this opportunity to explain that the sustainability of the economy for farmers and their families is also a guarantee for the [sustainability of the] European food production system.

**What do you expect from the EU CAP Network in the future?**

We find the cases studies that have participated in this TG very interesting and we would like to remain informed about the sustainability agreements that they reach in the future. They could serve as an inspiration for us.



Do like Esther - learn more about the CAPI CP thematic work and **join our upcoming Thematic Groups** as soon as the expressions of interest open!





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