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NEWSROOM

Stakeholder cooperation considered key in closing CAP evaluation data gaps

A Good Practice Workshop on addressing data gaps in evaluations of CAP Strategic Plans identified a mix of solutions to close information blind spots for future assessments, including cooperation between the key stakeholders involved.

The European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP organised its [fourth Good Practice Workshop](#), at which 82 participants from 25 EU Member States highlighted how closing data gaps will require closer cooperation between all stakeholders involved in an assessment, such as Managing Authorities, Paying Agencies, evaluators, researchers and other data providers, as well as the European Commission.

The workshop took place in Malmö, Sweden, on 8-9 June, and focussed on data management practices to support effective CAP Strategic Plan evaluations. During the two-day event, participants suggested that data gaps can also be closed by linking data sources to a robust evaluation framework consisting of key elements such as evaluation questions, factors of success and indicators. This can be further reinforced by using methods to measure change and attribute it to interventions.

Various solutions were also put forward at the workshop that could help close data gaps, such as adapting monitoring systems to new requirements, [elaborating complementary studies to collect missing data on biodiversity](#), including bumblebees and farmland birds, and the development of a [data management approach](#) that focuses on necessary and available information.

CAP evaluation stakeholders were finally advised to identify EU projects that propose approaches to addressing data gaps, such as [MEF4CAP](#), [FLINT](#) and [MIND STEP](#). Promising tools highlighted

included the use of digital farm books as well as digital accounting or meta-analyses and the use of numerical coefficients extracted from them.

More information on closing data gaps for CAP evaluations can be found in the workshop's [summary report](#).





NEWSROOM

Evaluation experts identify key elements to assess LEADER's added value

A Thematic Working Group from the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP is exploring how to assess LEADER's added value and identified key elements for future assessments, such as how much the local development method supported stakeholder involvement in decision-making.

EU Member States are expected to assess LEADER's added value during the implementation of their CAP Strategic Plans, demonstrating the benefits of using the local development method. However, this is a significant challenge due to the complex and sometimes quite intangible benefits of LEADER, such as determining how rural citizens' quality of life has been improved by it.

In response, the Evaluation Helpdesk established a [Thematic Working Group](#) (TWG). During its first meeting in May, more than 70 stakeholders discussed how to best capture LEADER added value, including Managing Authorities, evaluators, National Networks and Local Action Groups (LAGs). Together, the participants identified key aspects to assess LEADER's added value within the components of social capital, enhanced governance and results – including the growth of networks, how much the local development method supported stakeholder involvement in decision-making and the amount of new innovative and sustainable projects supported.

The experts have since refined the list of elements, which is now feeding into an evaluation framework to assess LEADER added

value around the three components. The framework will also outline key elements to assess and provide examples of evaluation questions, factors of success, outputs, results, impacts and potential data.

The next step of the TWG is to develop evaluation practice toolkits to explain various methodologies, practical steps, examples of method application and recommendations for Managing Authorities, LAGs and evaluators. By November, the evaluation framework and toolkits will be finalised, resulting in new guidelines to support EU Member States in evaluating the added value of LEADER.





SPOTLIGHT

Combining CAP evaluation tasks to reveal data gaps

Data gaps in CAP evaluations can prevent accurate and timely measurements of a Strategic Plan's achievements. However, there are useful ways to address these information blind spots. By combining CAP evaluation tasks, such as evaluation planning, data gaps can not only be uncovered, but also pave the way towards more evidence-based assessments and effective policy design.

Missing or insufficient information for CAP evaluations occur as measurement and/or attribution gaps. **Measurement gaps** refer to the absence of data for precise and timely calculations in changes for a specific indicator, while **attribution gaps** describe missing data or methods for quantifying the net contribution of an intervention.

Identifying and addressing these kind of gaps can be a daunting process, but a good place to begin is by reviewing and understanding the data requirements and the characteristics of the corresponding data sources during different CAP evaluation tasks, such as the development of [an evaluation plan](#) and its evaluation framework.

The evaluation plan can reveal data gaps through its 'needs and objectives' section. This part outlines the scope of each evaluation and the criteria that must be covered in depth. For example, if an evaluation is mostly assessing effectiveness, then it needs

appropriate data for the accurate and timely measurement of changes brought about by the implementation of a CAP Strategic Plan. If there is a need to assess the efficiency of certain types of interventions, then a Managing Authority should look for data gaps describing the costs of delivering the policy. If the objective is to gather insights for the next programming period, a comparison of the efficiency between different types of interventions might be required, which would entail a breakdown of achievements by intervention. In such a case, the Managing Authority should ensure that appropriate data are in place to allow this disaggregation.

Next, a detailed intervention logic and corresponding evaluation framework can be used to understand the full spectrum of data required to document the achievements of CAP Strategic Plans. During this task, corresponding data sources can be linked to each context, output, result and impact indicator, allowing for the identification of missing data for which there is no national or EU level data collection mechanism. In this case, Managing Authorities are advised to set up specific data collection arrangements. Data gaps can also occur even with existing and long-established data sources, which Managing Authorities can identify by checking the length of a time series, reporting frequency and time lag between collection and reporting, or the level of disaggregation of the collected data.



SPOTLIGHT

Managing Authorities, in close cooperation with evaluators, can go a step further in plugging data gaps by exploring robust but proportionate solutions that allow estimates of the net contribution of their CAP Strategic Plan to observed changes. During this task, specific attribution gaps may be revealed. These gaps may arise due to the data being insufficient to support the establishment of control groups and the limited or distant relationship between data collected and the operations and commitments supported by the CAP Strategic Plan.

However, identifying and closing such CAP evaluation data gaps often requires a long-term strategy and also additional resources, which may be a challenge for Managing Authorities and evaluators. But one way to overcome this is through the prioritisation of missing information. The evaluation plan can again prove helpful as its timeline of evaluations shows the urgent need to address specific gaps. The importance of missing information can be further determined by examining the size of financial allocations to interventions affected by it. Additionally, data prioritisation can centre around the potential to improve the accuracy of attributing observed changes to a CAP Strategic Plan.

Combining the prioritisation of data gaps with other CAP evaluation tasks outlined above shows how Managing Authorities and evaluators can adapt their existing tasks to enhance future planning and preparation of assessments. This complimentary approach will also see more benefits emerge, such as a stronger coherence between their CAP evaluation framework and an evaluation plan, as well as stronger findings for more effective policy design.



Incoming support from the Evaluation Helpdesk

The European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP, under the preparatory work for closing data and attribution gaps in view of the 2026 interim evaluation (Article 141.4, Regulation (EU) 2021/2115) is developing a comprehensive evaluation framework covering all Specific Objectives and evaluation criteria, which includes a wide spectrum of context, output, result and impact indicators, along with the corresponding data sources. The [outcomes of this work](#) are expected to be published on the EU CAP Network website before the end of 2023.

In addition, the Evaluation Helpdesk is preparing factsheets for each factor of success included in Annex I of Regulation (EU) 2022/1475, as well as additional factors of success for efficiency, relevance, coherence and EU value added. These factsheets contain references to applied methods for estimating the net effect of the corresponding types of interventions, which may be useful in terms of increasing Managing Authorities' and evaluators' awareness and in supporting the identification of potential attribution gaps.



Microdata centres can enhance future CAP evaluations

- Franz Sinabell, WIFO researcher

Franz Sinabell, a senior researcher from the [Austrian Institute of Economic Research \(WIFO\)](#), offers his advice on how to improve data availability and discusses how microdata centres can strengthen future CAP assessments.

What are the key data availability challenges facing CAP evaluations?

There are two key challenges – the first is gathering data to determine the effects of interventions related to environmental performance. For example, we do not have monitoring instruments to measure in detail whether nutrient loss is declining or whether biodiversity targets can be met. The second challenge is to evaluate profitability and competitiveness for similar reasons – we need to have microdata to evaluate these benefits.

How can EU Member States tackle these challenges?

EU Member States are setting up their data infrastructure to comply with the requirements regarding their performance review, but this requires information linked to issues such as environmental and economic performance, which can be missing. In Austria, evaluators of previous programmes are in touch with those building up these datasets, so they can inform them about additional data requirements. I would advise other countries to follow the same path and work closely with those evaluating their CAP Strategic Plan.

Can you tell me about the plan for the 'Austrian Agricultural Micro-Data Centre' and how it aims to make more information available for future CAP evaluations?

About 15 years ago, the Austrian government started an initiative to build the centre with a register of datasets, which is like a search engine to find different information. The new one for agriculture integrates past evaluation studies and reports into the centre, which means more data availability for those granted access.

WIFO also helped develop the design of this centre by conducting a survey asking evaluators of previous programmes about the data they used. We presented around 20 different datasets and found that each evaluator used at least two or three of them. Then we asked whether they are aware of additional datasets that might be helpful in future evaluations and they provided us with additional information. Now, the Austrian Ministry of Agriculture is working



out which of these datasets can be made available for future CAP evaluations through the centre.

What is your advice for other EU Member States interested in setting up a similar microdata centre?

A microdata centre requires a lot of effort and the right people with a long term vision. However, many countries have statistical offices with already established microdata centres, but often not for agricultural purposes. Consult national statistical offices on how they were able to establish it and then determine ways in which it can be developed for CAP evaluations.



SHOWCASE

Finnish research programme to back solutions for sustainable agriculture evaluations

A new research programme, MATO 2, will steer research activities to find different solutions that can support future CAP assessments dealing with complex environmental topics.

Finland's [MATO 2](#) is a multiannual research programme focusing on the environmental impacts of agriculture, which aims to provide information to better assess the country's CAP Strategic Plan.

The programme will outline how the research and development funding of Finland's Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry as well as the Ministry of the Environment will support agri-environmental issues. Its cross-cutting objective is to support projects that address greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture, biodiversity loss and economic sustainability.

Some initiatives that MATO 2 will focus on include assessments of carbon levels in soil and ways to evaluate farming activities that improve soil conditions, investigating the effects of agricultural environmental policy measures on pollinators and birds in 'hot spot' areas, and evaluating combined effects of different environmental goals on food safety and security of supply.

The programme will also promote ways to identify and close data gaps, such as developing solutions to use digital and remote sensors to assess soil quality and harmful substances in the ground, improve the knowledge base and data reserves regarding

soil biota, and solutions to support greater pollinator monitoring and research.

"With new research data, our understanding of the state of the environment will improve and be more accurate. This new information can be used in the evaluation of the effectiveness of the CAP's environmental and climate interventions," said Tiina Hartman, Senior Specialist at Finland's Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry.





SHOWCASE

Unlocking long-term data sets for better biodiversity assessments

The Centre of Estonian Rural Research and Knowledge (METK) has been using long-term studies to create ongoing datasets for assessing biodiversity, which can help future CAP evaluations make comparisons between programming periods.

National environmental monitoring programmes can focus more on protected habitats rather than on agricultural land itself, which makes it difficult, and costly, to obtain long-term data for CAP evaluations on agri-environment activities.

However in Estonia, the METK has been running biodiversity studies on arable fields for almost 20 years and continues to collect and synthesise data to feed evaluations.

“With our long-term studies, we have long-term data series,” said Eneli Viik, Chief Expert in Agri-Environmental Monitoring at METK. “We hope to continue these studies in the current CAP period and compare previous programmes.”

The studies still run today and capture data for biodiversity indicators relevant for future CAP evaluation, such as the abundance of bumblebees and farmland birds.

Maris Kruuse, the METK’s Deputy Head of Agroecology, explains that they hope to use this data for future CAP Strategic Plan assessments and link it with additional information from other sources, including Paying Agencies and new data obligations from farmers, i.e. collecting information on pesticide and fertiliser use. She adds that this mix of data also strengthens evaluation findings

and their impact as “farmers tend to trust research based on data collected from their fields”.

To replicate a similar approach, Eneli recommends exploring what data is currently available on a national level and then to redesign this to create a similar ongoing series. If nothing is available, she says “it is never too late to start”.

Learn more about METK’s approach to evaluating agri-environment activities [here](#).





NETWORKING

Tools4CAP presents future inventory of CAP analysis and monitoring solutions

A new Horizon Europe research project called Tools4CAP has offered a sneak peek into a collection of solutions to help design and monitor CAP Strategic Plans.

On 26 June, [Tools4CAP](#) coordinator Bérénice Dupeux opened an information session about the project and explained that it will provide an open-source inventory of solutions useful for more evidence-based policy design.

“Tools4CAP is about collecting what is happening in Member States and to learn from each other about the best practices in designing and monitoring Strategic Plans,” she said.

During the online meeting, Bérénice presented a preview into Tools4CAP’s inventory of solutions and what it will contain, including a collection of monitoring tools for data, like using artificial intelligence to automatically extract and classify data from geotagged photos - an aspect Bérénice expects can reduce Member States’ administrative burden and costs.

Policy analysis tools for ex ante evidence-based decisions were also presented, with one highlighted example being the Farm Model MKMG, which is a quantitative model developed in Slovenia to assess impacts on farmers’ income.

“These tools could assist Member States in designing Strategic Plans that best respond to their needs, much like a car GPS guides you to a new destination,” said Bérénice.

As part of this, Bérénice explained that a ‘Replication Lab’ will be established to demonstrate the solutions in different Member States and to promote their uptake across the EU. There will also be a ‘Capacity Building Hub’ that will reinforce end-users’ capacity to use Tools4CAP’s collection of tools, including models used by the European Commission.

Tools4CAP hopes to launch its online inventory of solutions by the end of 2023.



Networking key to implementing EU rural development policy

An evaluation of the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) and the National Rural Networks (NRN) shows that more stakeholders were involved in Rural Development Programmes (RDP), which saw greater implementation of the policy.

In June, the European Commission [published an evaluation](#) examining the ENRD's and NRNs' role in implementing EU rural development policy and found that it ensured a higher capacity and quality administration and management of the 2014-20 RDPs.

The study was carried out by ADE, S.A CCRI, and OIR, which concluded that more stakeholders participated in RDP implementation due to ENRD and NRN activities, notably through capacity building, strengthening understanding of key topics and facilitating knowledge exchange - ultimately improving RDPs' performance.



NETWORKING

The findings were based on data collected from seven case studies at EU and NRN levels as well as six online surveys targeting NRN stakeholders, such as Managing Authorities and evaluators.

The report offered 14 recommendations for the EU CAP Network, including greater engagement of more stakeholders in governance bodies and organising continuous assessments of stakeholders' needs.

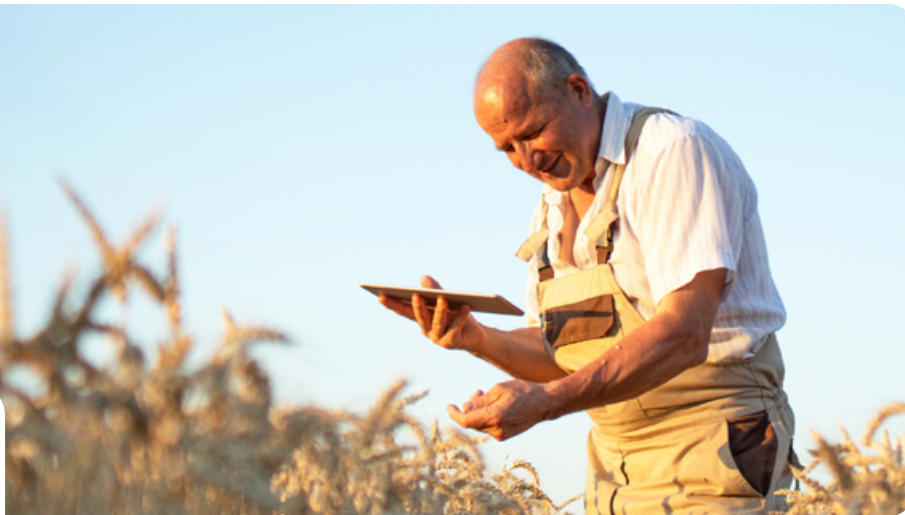
Evaluation Reading Corner

- > [Approved 28 CAP Strategic Plans \(2023-2027\)](#)
European Commission
- > [Catalogue of CAP interventions](#)
European Commission
- > [Guidelines: Evaluating the AKIS Strategic Approach in CAP Strategic Plans](#)
Evaluation Helpdesk
- > [Good Practice Workshop Report: Addressing data gaps to evaluate CAP Strategic Plans](#)
Evaluation Helpdesk
- > [Good Practice Workshop Report: Designing good evaluation plans for the new CAP](#)
Evaluation Helpdesk
- > [Evaluation Synthesis of WFP's Performance Measurement and Monitoring 2018-2021](#)
World Food Programme
- > [OECD-FAO, Agricultural Outlook 2023-32](#)
OECD/UN Food and Agriculture Organisation
- > [Grounding evaluation capacity development in systems theory](#)
German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval)
- > [Process and Implementation Evaluations: A Primer](#)
Harvard University



“Let’s focus on what we can already assess: exploit data of the old programming period, planned data for the new programming, early estimates on uptake... There are other avenues besides pure counterfactual!”

Sophie Helaine, Head of Unit AGRI A.3 (Policy Performance) at Good Practice Workshop Malmö (Sweden), 8-9 June 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 selection of upcoming events that can help evaluation stakeholders improve the quality and effectiveness of CAP assessments across the EU.



15 September 2023 - [Final Conference: Converting Farm Accountancy Data Network \(FADN\) into Farm Sustainability Data Network \(FSDN\)](#)



20-21 September 2023 - [Second National Networks Meeting](#)



2-4 October 2023 - [UK Evaluation Society Annual Conference 2023](#)



2-3 November 2023 - [17th International Conference of the Hellenic Association of Agricultural Economists](#)



23-24 November 2023 - [Good Practice Workshop on assessing LEADER added value](#)

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