

2nd National Networks Meeting

The main objective of the 2nd National Networks (NN) meeting was to identify and discuss the involvement of agri-food stakeholders in National Networks' activities. This aim was addressed through two main sessions: a panel discussion composed of EAGF beneficiaries and implementers and an interactive session which explored different approaches to streamlining communication with agri-food stakeholders. Furthermore, the progress of Thematic Clusters was presented by their members and updates on CAP Networks' activities were provided, including the new CNS structure and the [Agricultural and Rural Inspiration Awards 2023 \(ARIA\)](#).

Introduction

On the second day, several field visits to EAGF-funded projects in Poland were organised. Participants were divided into three groups, each visiting a set of projects. Detailed information on the projects visited can be found in factsheets on the [event page](#).

Welcome and introduction to the day



The 2nd NN Meeting was opened by Pawel Krzeczunowicz, Team Leader of the Polish National Network, who welcomed participants on behalf of the Secretary of State at the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, Mr Janusz Kowalski.



In his welcome speech, Hugo Almeida, Deputy Head of Unit D1 'Rural areas and Networks' from DG AGRI/European Commission, highlighted the significant task that rural networks are carrying out to transition to CAP Networks. This process should ensure that any possible gap between stakeholders with interests in both the EAGF and European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) is bridged.

Involving Pillar 1 stakeholders in National Networks' activities



Alistair Prior, CAPI CP, introduced the session with a [framing presentation](#), providing an overview of the CAP's objectives and emphasising the networking opportunities under the EAGF. Importantly, the potential interdependencies between the EAGF and the EAFRD were highlighted, including initiatives such as eco-schemes and Agri-Environmental Climate Measures (AECM).

Event Information

Date: 20-21 September 2023

Location: Leszno, Poland

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

Participants: 68 participants from 25 Member States

Outcomes: Exploring the involvement of European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF) beneficiaries in National Networks' activities; presenting the progress of Thematic Clusters, the new structure of the Common Network Statistics (CNS) and the Agricultural and Rural Inspiration Awards (ARIA); and providing updates on CAP Networks' activities.

Web page: [2nd National Networks Meeting](#)



A panel then discussed the role of networking in supporting the implementation of the EAGF. The panellists were:

- Hanna Chodkowska, young farmer, COPA-COGECA, Women's Committee & Polish Chamber of Agriculture (KRIR).
- Adam Nowak, President of the Polish Rural Youth Association, former vice-president of CEJA, and young farmer.
- Joanna Gierulska, Deputy President of the Polish Paying Agency.
- Remco Schreuder, Dutch Managing Authority/Paying Agency.

The main message from the discussion was that National Networks should not distinguish between two funds in the CAP Strategic Plans (CSP). They are well placed to facilitate knowledge exchange between policy and practice on the synergies between the two funds and communicate these 'novel' opportunities to farmers.



Panellists also reflected on how networking resolves gaps in communication and engagement, including:

- Sharing good practices to support policy implementation.
- Organising thematic groups of agricultural and environmental stakeholders to address sustainability and biodiversity issues.
- Effectively communicating with farmers about both funds of the CAP.
- Strengthened cooperation to stimulate generational renewal, inspire young people and empower women.

This session set the scene for the interactive group work.





Streamlining communication and engagement with Pillar 1 stakeholders

The **'Stakeholders Archipelago' exercise** aimed to explore ways to enhance communication and engagement among National Networks and specific agri-food stakeholders, including farmers, farmer organisations, environmental NGOs, researchers, producers' organisations & cooperatives, and advisers.



In three rounds of discussions, participants delved into two key questions: the benefits of increased involvement with the National Network and the most effective methods and channels for engagement and communication. Participants were divided into six distinct 'islands', each representing a different stakeholder group.



Ultimately, the results from each stakeholder group were shared in the plenary session, allowing for the identification of common benefits such as knowledge exchange, networking or involvement in the policy development and implementation. Effective methods of engagement mentioned included events, individual peer-to-peer recommendations or consultation and capacity building activities of the Network. A separate report with a synthesis of the ideas and insights generated during this session will be available on the [event page](#).

Thematic clusters: Progress and reflections

Following the **interactive session on thematic clusters** that took place in March 2023 during the 1st NN Meeting, this session provided an update on the progress of thematic and geographical clusters. These clusters are led by National Networks, providing an informal space for them to discuss specific topics or share any relevant news.



Representatives of each cluster shared news about their activity, including topics for discussion, such as sharing good practices on communication (Communication cluster), smart farming, research and innovation (AKIS cluster), role of networks in the Rural Pact (Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas cluster), sharing success stories (Rural Youth cluster), digitalisation (Smart agriculture cluster), learning from each other's experiences (Eco-schemes cluster), involving farmers in evaluation activities (Evaluation cluster) and providing insights on the 'antennas programme' in each National Network (Regional antenna cluster).

New Common Network Statistics structure

The Common Network Statistics (CNS) is a mechanism for collecting data on NN activities. This is done annually for the preceding year. These data are subsequently analysed by the Contact Point to gain insights, make comparisons and establish benchmarks, ultimately generating valuable information about the Network's operations.



Veronika Korcekova, from the CAPI CP of the EU CAP Network, presented the **new set of CNS indicators** for the current programming period (2023-2027).

The new structure is the outcome of a participatory process that commenced in 2021, involving feedback from the networks and discussions during meetings, such as the one held in the Netherlands. The data collection using the new CNS structure is scheduled to be launched in December 2023.

Agriculture and Rural Inspiration Awards (ARIA)



Dana Freshley, from the CAPI CP of the EU CAP Network, presented the latest update on **ARIA**. The competition categories include smart and competitive projects, environmental protection and the socio-economic fabric of rural areas. Additionally, there was a dedicated category for projects related to rural stakeholder skills, in line with the overarching theme and the European Year of Skills.

Furthermore, representatives of Romanian, Spanish and Irish Networks shared successful good practices that they implemented for this or previous editions of the competition, such as engaging the Paying Agency in the evaluation process, organising a capacity-building session at the national level or adopting a proactive approach reaching potential participants.



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Update on CAP networks' activities



Nicolas Esgain, from the Communication and Logistical support team of the EU CAP Network, made a presentation on the development of the **2023-2024 EU CAP Network Annual Work Programme (AWP)**. The presentation included an update on the governance of the Network, and the Network's timeline for publications and major events.

Several NN initiatives were shared during this session too. Some of these activities were promoted through the Bulletin Board displayed throughout the meeting.





Pawel Krzeczunowicz (Polish NN) informed participants about the next [‘Network to Innovate’](#) webinars.



Anna Hedberg (Swedish NN) showcased a [new campaign](#) produced by the Network in dialogue with the federation for farmers in Sweden to improve transparency and promote the benefits of EU support and programmes for everyone.



Giuliana Keller (DG AGRI) highlighted the [study](#) published last June 2023 on the contributions of the ENRD and the National Rural Networks to the implementation of rural development policies and thanked the networks for their valuable contribution and participation in the case studies and surveys.



Søren Klixbüll (Danish NN) invited the networks to the forthcoming NN meeting in Denmark, provisionally scheduled for March 2024. Other networks were invited to contact the EU CAP Network Contact Point if they were to have any interest in co-hosting future NN Meetings.

Closing remarks



Hugo Almeida from DG AGRI underlined the fruitful exchanges during the day and appreciated the NNs' commitment to the EU CAP Network, especially to those participants who attended this networking meeting for the first time.

He highlighted the importance of improving the effectiveness of NNs, like better communication with stakeholders, improving knowledge transfer, creating new thematic groups, etc.

He stressed the crucial role that NNs have not only in implementing the CAP but also in integrating EU strategies in the territories, such as the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas. Thanks were given to the organisers - the EU CAP Network and the Polish NN - and to everyone present at the meeting.

