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Enhancing CAP Strategic Plans through evaluations

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NEWSROOM

A new comprehensive catalogue of CAP interventions launched for public use

The searchable online catalogue provides a real-time version of intervention related data from the latest approved versions of Member States' CAP Strategic Plans. It is available on the European Commissions' Agri-data portal and through the EU CAP Network website.

The Commission's Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development (DG AGRI), with support from the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP unveiled a new online 'Catalogue of CAP Interventions'. This tool offers convenient and comprehensive access to Member States' CAP interventions and their characteristics including budgets, planned output, result indicators and specific design etc. It will help policymakers and researchers consult any intervention quickly, make comparisons and perform further analysis. It is available in English but also in the original languages of the Member States.

The 28 CAP Strategic Plans approved earlier this year contain a total of 2,416 interventions. Each intervention brings its own set of quantitative data and design elements. So far, all this information has been only accessible in PDF files. The key features of the catalogue include a set of user-friendly filters to select the intervention type, Member State, result and output indicators, and CAP Specific Objectives. The set of corresponding interventions is then displayed in an exportable results table, with their budget and output information. The description of the specific design is also accessible upon selection of a single intervention.

Guillaume Pierre, evaluation advisor at the Evaluation Helpdesk, prepared the prototype in collaboration with DG AGRI and explains that "the main challenge has been to extract the many different types of information from CAP Strategic Plans and to organise all of it in a simple format easy to use in the catalogue. It will serve as an indispensable tool for the analysis, monitoring and evaluation of CAP".

The database underpinning the online catalogue is updated regularly and provides a real-time version of data from the latest approved version of CAP Strategic Plans. The team behind the CAP catalogue is already planning its next update, aiming to incorporate more data elements and concepts from each intervention, and offer even more filtering and search functionalities. With data playing an ever more instrumental role in performance monitoring and evaluation of the new CAP delivery model, the catalogue stands to be a cornerstone resource for years to come for the CAP monitoring and evaluation community.

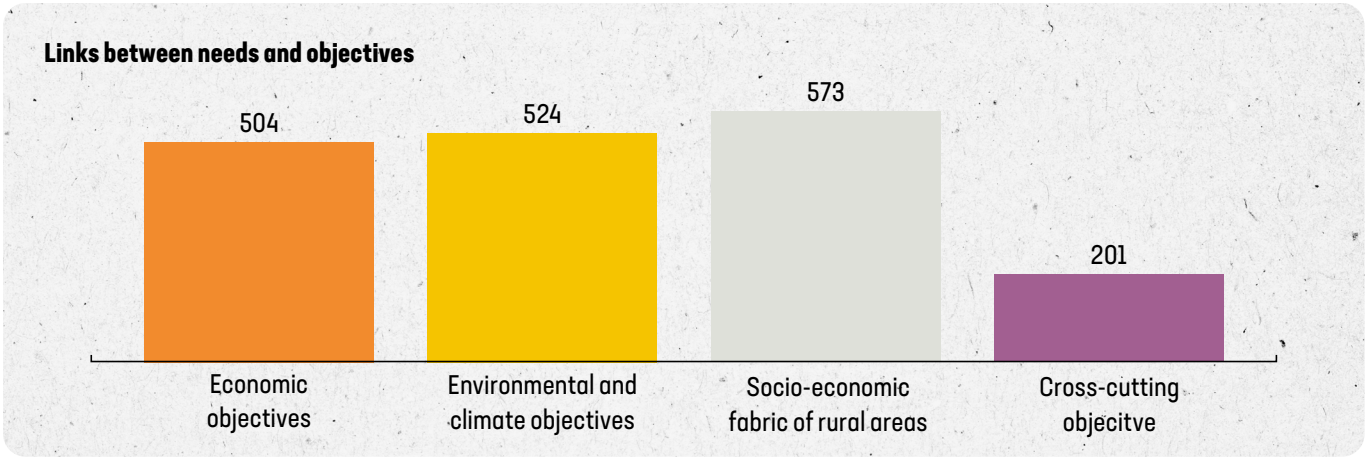
SPOTLIGHT

Mapping and analysing CAP Strategic Plans. Member States continue to prioritise farmers' income and increase efforts for climate change mitigation

With the 2023-2027 programming period, for the first time, Member States designed CAP Strategic Plans for the implementation of the CAP in their territories. To gain a better understanding of Member States' ambitions, the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP has undertaken a comprehensive mapping of all choices made in the plans and provided a first analysis of the potential joint contribution by Member States to the ten specific objectives of the CAP.

Overall, Member States identified more than 1,600 needs related to the specific objectives and the cross-cutting objective in the agriculture sector and rural areas.

All interventions designed in the CAP Strategic Plans (CSPs) address at least one of the identified needs. Needs related to economic objectives are generally aligned across CSPs and received high prioritisation. Environmental and climate needs had varying degrees of prioritisation across Member States. The needs related to General Objective 3, which strengthens the socio-economic fabric of rural areas, varied more due to the different national context among Member States. It should be noted that Member States had substantial flexibility to address needs through other policy tools outside the CAP, which are considered a better fit because of competing priorities and limited funds.



Source: European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP (2023)

Between July 2022 and June 2023, the Evaluation Helpdesk examined the CSPs based on the needs identified and the interventions designed to address them. The financial allocation, planned outputs and targets set for the funded actions constitute important building blocks for the mapping and analysis, complemented by a qualitative assessment of the design of the planned interventions.

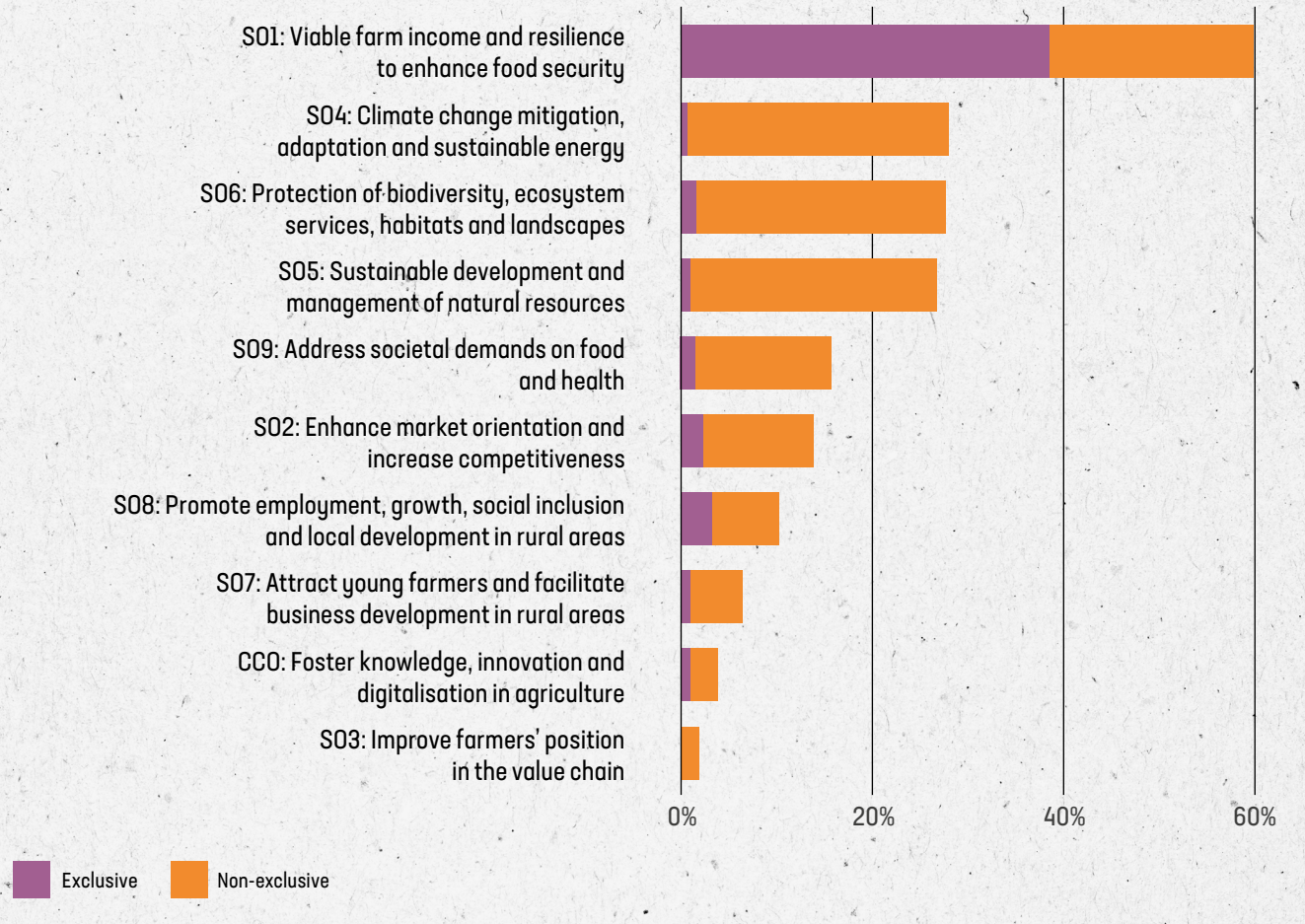
The Evaluation Helpdesk led and coordinated numerous external experts. The study was organised by specific objectives, and for each objective, an expert in the field oversaw and drafted the mapping and analysis. The experts counted on major backing from two teams: the data management team which processed all quantitative inputs from the System for Fund Management in the European Union (SFC) and the team of 'screeners' which read all CSPs, and summarised and organised the information to allow for comparison and synthesis across Member States.

A comprehensive report with the findings has just been published.

About 2,500 interventions have been designed in the 28 CSPs, supported by EUR 307 billion for the 2023-2027 programming period.

Most interventions contribute to multiple objectives, highlighting their multifunctionality and the complex challenges to address them. Due to the legal framework, rural development interventions allowed for greater flexibility in design compared to direct payment interventions. The allocation of EU funds is agreed on in the Multiannual Financial Framework. Thus, an important part of the financial allocation was pre-defined. When including national co-financing, 62% of the total CSP planned expenditure is allocated to direct payment interventions, 35% to rural development interventions and 3% to sectoral support. The highest share of the CAP budget has been allocated to the interventions linked to the specific objectives on income support and on environment and climate.

Share of the total CAP budget (total public expenditure including national co-financing) allocated by specific objective (SO), 2023-2027



Source: European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP (2023)

This shows that Member States continue to prioritise the support of farmers' income, mainly through direct payments, but also through the support for Areas with Natural Constraints. Across plans, there is also a growing emphasis on more targeted income support through, for example, the design of eco-schemes, Complementary Redistributive Income Support for Sustainability (CRISS), Coupled Income Support and Complementary Income Support for Young Farmers (CISYF), as well as support for improving agricultural productivity.

Nearly 400 000 farms are expected to receive support for productivity investments, marking an increase compared to 2021, which may slow down recent decreases in agriculture productivity. Although recent years have witnessed some progress in the realm of agricultural income, a substantial income disparity still persists between the agricultural sector and other sectors across most Member States. While market-generated revenues are the principal source of farm income, the CAP continues to play a pivotal role, contributing to an average of 23% of agricultural incomes in 2020.

The largest financial contribution to the environmental and climate objectives comes from eco-schemes, with EUR 44.7 billion or 24% of the total direct payment envelope. Agri-environmental-climate and other commitments under rural development (Article 70), are allocated EUR 33.2 billion (EU and national co-financing), equivalent to 30% of the total public expenditure allocated to rural development. Approaches towards designing eco-schemes and agri-environmental-climate and other commitments differ across Member States. Some focus on engaging many farmers in a small and incremental, but widespread, change in farm practices, whereas others choose to emphasise more targeted interventions. Also, investment support interventions and the support for training, knowledge exchange and innovation in Operational Groups may come to play an important role in the successful implementation of environmental and climate interventions.

The CSPs contain positive elements in terms of contributing to climate change mitigation, particularly related to carbon sequestration, but the overall impact from Member States' choices remains uncertain. Farm practices that serve the purpose of GHG reduction are included to a lesser extent. The CSPs partially address the promotion of renewable energy production, bioeconomy development and sustainable forestry. Strategies for adaptation to climate change are acknowledged in the CSPs. However, the level of detail and explicit consideration of their contribution to this issue is lacking and clear strategic and long-term approaches for climate resilience and adaptation are not clearly outlined.

The CSPs reflect the joint efforts of Member States to address issues related to the use of natural resources and towards the protection of biodiversity and preservation of habitats and landscapes. Besides conditionality, support from the EU's Water Framework Directive payments, eco-schemes and agri-

environmental-climate commitments are directed toward farm practices beneficial for, in particular, water quality and soil management, improved fertiliser and pesticide management and agronomic measures. The enhanced conditionality together with the design of voluntary interventions will likely contribute to the Green Deal ambition to reduce the use and loss of fertilisers and the use and risk of chemical pesticides by 2030, and towards the target of at least 10% of high diversity landscape features on agricultural land by 2030, as defined in the EU Biodiversity Strategy.

The CSPs also demonstrate increased ambitions to support organic farming, with both increased financial allocations and area supported from the CAP compared to the previous programming period, and in line with the Green Deal target to have 25% of the EU agricultural area under organic farming by 2030. However, in some cases, considering the urgency and scale of nature restoration needed on the EU's more intensive farmland areas, as identified from the needs, the financial allocation and the targets set appear limited.

Member States' choices demonstrate a continued effort to contribute to increasing the number of young and new farmers in the coming years, however the overall impact of the choices of Member States on rural development remains uncertain. Approximately 368 000 young farmers are planned to receive support for establishing agricultural production over the 2023-2027 period. But overall, the financial allocations for the interventions designed to address the socio-economic needs of rural areas, in particular LEADER, do not correspond to the high number of needs identified. It is plausible to assume that Member States have instead prioritised addressing other objectives to a greater extent within the CAP, given the availability of other tools to address the socio-economic needs at both national and EU level.

Almost all Member States plan to support innovation through EIP-AGRI and all CSPs support knowledge exchange. The number of EIP Operational Groups planned per year tripled compared to the CAP in the 2014-2020 programming period. However, the low financial allocation (0.1% to 2.7% of the total CAP budget, across all CSPs) to knowledge-related interventions such as skills, training, advice, knowledge exchange and on-farm demonstrations is surprising and limiting, considering the numerous needs identified in this regard. Also, the CAP support for the adoption of digital technologies shows rather low ambition, with less than 3% of farms expected to benefit from such support despite small and medium-sized farms facing challenges in accessing digital technologies.

SHOWCASE

Creating a common language to better understand CAP Strategic Plan complexity

Labelling all CAP Strategic Plans interventions according to the 'Farm Practice' classification is an exercise carried out by the EU Joint Research Centre (JRC) and the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP to support the European Commission, and its goal is to develop a common language to better understand Member States' CAP Strategic Plans.

The JRC developed the Farm Practice classification which consists of a scheme divided into 18 different sections (biodiversity-related practices, plant protection products-related practices, animal welfare practices etc.). Each section has three tiers, e.g. levels of details, meaning the classification contains about 300 farm practices. This classification is being revised based on lessons learned during the labelling project. When the labelling of all interventions from the CAP Strategic Plans is finalised by both the JRC and Evaluation Helpdesk, it will be made available through the new online 'Catalogue of CAP Interventions'.

Irene Guerrero, JRC researcher, explains the objectives of the project.

What are the main benefits from labelling all interventions from the CAP Strategic Plans according to the Farm Practice classification?

There are several key benefits of this exercise to consider. The first positive effect is the simplification, by reducing the complexity of options and terms associated with the CAP interventions in the CAP Strategic Plans. Member States have designed interventions that suit their specific needs and conditions, however, there are cases where different interventions prescribe similar actions, but with different terminologies. By using the Farm Practice classification, we can eliminate confusion and streamline the comparisons of these interventions. Moreover, this simplification would greatly support the evaluation and monitoring of the CAP. With a structured framework in place, we can systematise the interventions and identify their common elements. This allows for a more standardised assessment of how well the policy is performing. By labelling interventions according to their farming practices, we can better understand their contributions to the CAP goals and objectives.

Lastly, the classification scheme will facilitate the reporting obligations of both Member States and the Commission by enabling the extraction and comparison of the contents of interventions across different Member States and CAP areas. This means we can get a broader view of the efforts being made to tackle climate change, protect natural resources, preserve biodiversity and promote health. It allows for a comprehensive analysis of the various approaches taken by different countries and regions.

How have you developed the iMap coefficients and what is the purpose of this work is?

The iMAP project is an administrative agreement between the EU Joint Research Centre and the Commission's Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development (DG AGRI). Its main goal is to provide scientific support and tools for the CAP Strategic Plan regulation, with a specific focus on climate and environmental objectives. One of the ways is by evaluating the environmental impacts of different farming practices based on the available scientific evidence, to better understand how farming practices can be more sustainable. To assess these impacts, the project uses a systematic review of meta-analyses, in this case, of how agricultural practices affect the environment. By looking at a group of different studies, we can get a clearer picture of the overall effects.

We retrieve meta-analysis on the environmental effects of sustainable farming practices from scientific journals and extract numerical coefficients from them. Thus, these coefficients represent the combined results of multiple experiments on the same topic. So, for example, from a meta-analysis done by the authors Ti, C., Xia, L., Chang, S. X., and Yan, X. (Potential for mitigating global agricultural ammonia emission: a meta-analysis. Environmental Pollution, 245, 2019) we retrieve a positive effect of the substitution of synthetic fertiliser by manure on reducing ammonia emissions. This effect is quantified as a -67.2% reduction in emissions and this figure is based on aggregating the results of 16 independent experiments to produce a single number.

How can the coefficients be used?

Different users, from the JRC to external researchers and the Commission, need quantitative data to perform different analyses related to the environmental effects of farming practices. The most direct use that can be made of these numbers is the quantitative estimation of these effects, beyond a pure qualitative estimate of a positive or negative effect. For instance, these data have been used in dissemination campaigns for the elaboration of infographics and other communication materials.

Moreover, this type of quantitative data can be used to feed models such as CAPRI modelling system, an agro-economic model designed for the Commission to assess economic and environmental impacts on agriculture at regional level. Other uses of these numerical data include their application to estimate the potential effects of strategic plans proposed by Member States in support of their evaluation frameworks. These coefficients are derived from synthesised scientific work, which encompasses data from a number of individual studies. That means that the coefficients calculated in this way provide overall, robust data that can compensate when particular data are not available.

SHOWCASE

Unleashing digital tools to back evaluations of CAP support for the management of natural resources

The Greek CAP Strategic Plan incentivises farmers to use digital tools, like the Farm Sustainability Tool (FaST), through which a wealth of data at the farm level will be available to improve CAP evaluations, including on the use of fertilisers, and pesticides and irrigation practices.

Under the eco-schemes for climate, environment and animal welfare, the Greek CAP Strategic Plan provides support to farmers for the use of digital tools, like the Farm Sustainability Tool (FaST). FaST, is a digital service platform supported by the European Commission and the EU Space Agency for the generation and re-use of solutions for sustainable and competitive agriculture based on space data and other private and public data sets.

As an application for mobile phones, FaST will help Greek farmers and farm advisers to optimise the management of nutrients and work alongisde other digital tools specialised on pesticides and irrigation management at parcel level. Additionally, the Greek CAP Strategic Plan will provide additional support to farmers for carrying out specific field measurements, such as soil or leaf analyses, enriching the data stored in these digital tools.

"Collecting data from beneficiaries will improve the monitoring and evaluation performance of the CAP. Such digital tools could be the beginning of a new culture of data provided by the farmers," said Anthi Katsirma, evaluation officer at the Greek CAP Strategic Plan Managing Authority.

The data generated throughout these tools will be stored in a central web portal managed by the Greek paying agency and will be available, upon request, for evaluation purposes. This can create many benefits for the assessments of the CAP Strategic Plan interventions designed to improve the management of water resources. For example, the detailed data on the use of nutrients, along with their geo-spatial reference and link to Integrated Administration and Control System (IACS), as well as soil and climate data, may significantly improve the calculation of impact indicator I.15 (Gross nutrient balance on agricultural land) for the supported farms. Furthermore, they may contribute to the improvement of the estimation of the national coefficients used for calculating the indicator I.15 at national level.

In case of tools that include specific modules for pesticides, the generated data may be used to triangulate the findings of the impact indicator I.18 (Sustainable and reduced use of pesticides) in the farms that chose the FaST and/or other digital tools. Finally, the data coming from the irrigation module may provide valuable information on water consumption in the supported farms, contributing to an improved calculation of the impact indicator I.17 (Water exploitation index +).

NETWORKING

Irish evaluation stakeholders highlight need for reappraising AKIS

Participants at an online capacity building event wished to enhance the structure of AKIS to reach a broader farmer community.

At an online capacity building event on 25 October 2023, the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP's Geographic Experts Stephanie Vella and Maria Cini explained the stages of AKIS (Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems) evaluation, its phases, criteria and key elements to Irish stakeholders.

"The first starting step in the evaluation framework requires revisiting the intervention logic of the CAP Strategic Plans to determine whether the needs have been adequately derived. This serves as a starting point to derive the evaluation questions and eventually, whether the intended objectives have been met," said Stephanie Vella, the Evaluation Helpdesk's Geographic Expert who organised the meeting.

"The evaluation framework should emphasise the enhancement of the AKIS structure to facilitate improved knowledge transfer," said Tom Rafter, a consultant specialised in farm finance who attended the event. "It is imperative that we develop effective methods to reach all farmers, considering their different abilities and needs," he concluded.

New ideas were raised during the Irish workshop, such as the need for a fundamental reappraisal of AKIS for farmers, how to establish a common understanding of AKIS and its objectives, and how to address future challenges of this system that aims to spark innovation in farming practice.

Evaluation Reading corner

- Mapping and Analysis of CAP Strategic Plans – European Commission
- Evaluation support study of the costs and benefits of the implementation of LEADER - European Commission
- Study on the effects of exceptional market measures implemented during the 2014-2016 dairy market disturbance – European Commission
- Synthesis and analysis study of the public consultation and evaluation reports of Member States pertaining to the EU school fruit, vegetables and milk scheme 2017-2022 - European Commission
- Establishing an operational programme. Supporting producer organisations to contribute to strengthening farmer's position in the agri-food supply chain and improving the economic, social and environmental sustainability of farm: final study report - European Commission
- Agricultural Policy Monitoring and Evaluation 2023 - OECD
- Evaluation Insight Note: Integrating Resilience into Food Security Operations - World Bank Group

"The Labelling of CAP interventions by Farm Practices is a very important work which is going to be the basis of several analyses, not only by the Commission but also by researchers who will want to analyse the CAP... Once the classification is in place, I think it can also be used to improve notifications to the UN of greenhouse gas emissions.... So that we too can show that European farmers are making progress in reducing greenhouse gas emissions".

Sophie Helaine, Head of Unit AGRI.3 (Policy Performance)

GET INVOLVED

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

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

Events Calendar

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

- 17 January 2024 – Tools4CAP Academy Module 1 – Inventory of methods and tools
- 5-7 March 2024 – 4th GEF Evaluating Environment and Development Conference
- 18-19 April 2024 – EERS Conference 2024
- 4-8 June 2024 – gLocal evaluation week 2024
- 10-13 September 2024 – Global Evidence Summit (GES2)
- 23-27 September 2024 – "Better Together 2024: Collaborative Thought and Action for Better Evaluation" - European Evaluation Society Conference

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