

## Training programmes to boost food-related entrepreneurship in European rural areas

Improving skills to reduce inequalities and ensure economic recovery and inclusive and sustainable long-term growth in rural areas with declining populations

**Many European countries are witnessing a significant decrease in the population in rural areas, leading to demographic and economic challenges. These areas have become known as 'Empty Europe'. But they are often places with a rich history of food production and gastronomy. The Erasmus+ project SAGA has created a training programme so that local people can capitalise on this heritage, creating jobs and making the rural area attractive again.**

Rural populations are declining. Diana Pazaurek of DDRIÜ (STRIA South Transdanubian Regional Innovation Agency), who is coordinating the project, explains: "Depopulation is closely linked to economic issues such as high unemployment rates, low professional activity rates, demographic issues such as an ageing population, emigration to urban areas, low birth rates, and also to a lack of public services."

SAGA (Social And GAstronomic entrepreneurship in empty Europe) is an Erasmus+ project which addressed the economic recovery and sustainable long-term growth of these rural areas affected by population decline. In order to achieve this, the six partner organisations developed an innovative training programme specifically for people living in these types of rural areas. The programme provides support related to employment as well as the revitalisation of local areas from both an economic and social perspective. It allows adults in rural areas to acquire or improve their skills to set up a social enterprise related to gastronomy, food production or culinary heritage. Diana says: "The increase in production of local, sustainable, quality products serves to boost the economy, attract tourism and also foster social, educational, economic and personal development for individuals, and increase their opportunities for employment."

Co-creation, co-sharing and collaborative skills are an important part of the programme. Diana says: "The collaborative aspect of the social enterprise is important - cooperation of entrepreneurs with others in their local and regional communities increases their motivation and confidence and has a positive effect on the survival of their ventures."

The project contributed to increasing the establishment of collaborative social food-related enterprises in the participating rural regions. Between 2020 and 2022, the project partners worked with 30 local communities in five countries. The training course was tried and tested with 117 people and, as a result, 198 business plans were created.

Furthermore, the knowledge sharing and mutual learning that took place between partners throughout the life time of the project also increased the knowledge base and staff competences. Partners were able to boost their position and competitiveness in the field of education and training, and consultancy when it comes to offering business assistance.



The project partners are disseminating the programme widely, using the training guides to help to generate awareness. Diana explains: "This approach can be transferred to any other training or educational setting in which the need for (collaborative) social enterprise is apparent."

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## Background information

### Project information

- > [SAGA website](#)
- > [SAGA Facebook page](#)
- > [SAGA Learning Programme](#)

### EU CAP Network Seminar 'Skills and lifelong learning for agricultural advisory and training service providers'

To speed up the twin green and digital transition in agriculture and, at the same time, make sure that it is socially fair and just, it is crucial to have a more skilled and qualified agriculture community.

Several EU initiatives have addressed this topic in the past. Under the CAP Strategic Plans, the specific role of **advisors and training providers** in meeting this need has been highlighted in specific interventions and as part of the Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS) strategic approach. The EU CAP Network is therefore organising a seminar which aims to encourage the exchange of knowledge and identification of good practices for training and advisory services to support lifelong learning across the AKIS.

Find out more on the [EU CAP Network seminar 'Skills and lifelong learning for agricultural advisory and training service providers'](#) (21-22 February 2024) for advisors, training providers including representatives from vocational education and training organisations, and Managing Authorities.

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### Project photos:

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STRIA hosted the last meeting of the project as lead partner. To mark the end of the project, SAGA partners took a photo in the main square of Pécs, Hungary - © SAGA



During the last transnational project meeting, the partners discussed and finalised, among other things, the exploitable results and impact analysis of the SAGA project - © SAGA



**Diana Pazaurek** from the organisation coordinating the project - DDRIÚ (STRIA South Transdanubian Regional Innovation Agency) Hungary - © SAGA

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### More information on skills and lifelong learning and AKIS

#### EU CAP Network 'Innovation & knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI' activities

##### Focus Groups

- [EU CAP Network Focus Group Social farming and innovations](#)
- [EIP-AGRI Focus Group New entrants into farming](#)
- [EUCAP Network Focus Group competitive and resilient mountain areas](#)

##### Events

- [EU CAP Network Seminar 'Skills and lifelong learning for agricultural advisory and training service providers' \(February 2024\)](#)
- [EU CAP Network seminar fostering an effective and integrated AKIS in Member States \(June 2023\)](#)
- [EIP-AGRI Seminar 'CAP Strategic Plans: the key role of AKIS in Member States' \(September 2020\)](#)
- [EIP-AGRI seminar New skills for digital farming \(February 2020\)](#)
- [EIP-AGRI Workshop 'Enabling farmers for the digital age: the role of AKIS' \(April 2018\)](#)
- [EIP-AGRI Seminar 'Promoting creativity and learning through agricultural knowledge systems and interactive innovation' \(December 2015\)](#)

##### Publications & videos

- [EIP-AGRI Brochure 'Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems \(AKIS\) - Boosting innovation and knowledge flows across Europe', February 2022](#)
- [EIP-AGRI Brochure 'Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems - Stimulating creativity and learning', February 2018](#)
- [EU CAP Network Brochure: Social innovation - solutions for thriving agriculture, forestry and rural areas](#)
- [EIP-AGRI Video: AKIS - Building effective knowledge flows across Europe](#)

##### Inspirational ideas from the network

- [Inspirational ideas: Healthy, tasty and social vegetables \(Romania\)](#)
- [Inspirational ideas: Opportunities for advisors under Horizon Europe](#)
- [Inspirational ideas: Advisors and AKIS in Slovenia \(Slovenia\)](#)
- [Awareness raising campaign on AKIS in the Netherlands \(The Netherlands\)](#)

#### Operational Groups working on skills and lifelong learning and AKIS

A number of other Operational Groups working on lifelong learning and AKIS are available in the [database](#). Some examples below:

- [Danú Farming Group - Project Plan for a Biological Farming Transition Programme \(Ireland\)](#)
- [Capacity Building for local organic fruit and vegetable producers to promote the transition to sustainability of public procurement in Madrid, Valencia, Canary Islands \(Spain\)](#)
- [CREATIVE FARMER TRAINING COURSE \(France\)](#)
- [ECOPIONET: Innovation and Bioeconomy in Rural Environment \(Spain\)](#)
- [FORUM Connemara Farm Health & Safety initiative - Promoting & enhancing on-farm Health and Safety at local level on farms across North West Connemara \(Ireland\)](#)
- [Land in connection \(The Netherlands\)](#)
- [Producing a virtual reality learning environment on cattle health and welfare \(Finland\)](#)
- [Starters Farm / Starters boerderij \(The Netherlands\)](#)
- [FarmPEAT \(Farm Payments for Ecological and Agricultural Transitions\) Project \(Ireland\)](#)
- [A decision support system in cereal crops using remote sensing \(Spain\)](#)
- [A tool for integrated business management within agriculture with several industries \(Sweden\)](#)
- [Creation of tools to enable young farmers to raise awareness of climate change and consider solutions before, during and after their installation \(France\)](#)
- [GO PROTEINS - Capitalize and innovate in a network with farmers and their partners towards a "protein" skills center in Bourgogne-Franche-Comté \(France\)](#)
- [Good, because from Lower Silesia \(Poland\)](#)
- [Digital platform for winegrowers in implementing common environmental approaches to reduce the negative environmental impacts of agriculture \(Slovenia\)](#)
- [Safe Farm EIP Project \(Ireland\)](#)
- [Comeragh Uplands and Communities EIP Project \(Ireland\)](#)



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- [Romagna Food Forest: nuovi sistemi produttivi a basso impatto per il recupero di aree forestali - Rafforest](#) (Italy)
- [Mental well-being starts at school](#) (Belgium)
- [Assessment regarding the implementation and management of vegetable and cereal agroforestry plots in Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur](#) (France)
- [A healthy, local, circular food chain in the Rivierenland Region](#) (The Netherlands)
- [Overcome your difficulties by reappropriating the tools of accounting and management, improving the organization and developing a strategic vision](#) (France)
- [Scottish Organic Milk Producers: Grass to Milk Organically](#) (UK)
- [Circular roundhouse shelter with natural experience center](#) (The Netherlands)
- [Montessori thought as innovation in social agriculture in the Marche Region](#) (Italy)
- [RegGAE: Natural regulations on field crops with agroecological practices](#) (France)
- [PROVENDOP - Innovation in the production chain of the Venetian dry-cured ham](#) (Italy)
- [NEFERTITI - Networking European Farms to Enhance Cross Fertilisation and Innovation Uptake through Demonstration](#): [CORDIS](#) (01/2018-12/2021)
- [ClieNFarms - Climate Neutral Farms](#): [CORDIS](#) (01/01/2022-31/12/2025)
- [AGRISPIN - Space for Agricultural Innovation](#): [CORDIS](#) (03/2015-08/2017)
- [AgriLink - Agricultural Knowledge: Linking farmers, advisors and researchers to boost innovation](#): [CORDIS](#) (06/2017-05/2021)
- [BOND - Bringing Organisations and Network Development to higher levels in the farming sector in Europe](#): [CORDIS](#) (11/2017-10/2020)
- [NEXTFOOD - Educating the next generation of professionals in the agrifood system](#): [CORDIS](#) (05/2018-04/2022)
- [LIAISON - Better Rural Innovation: Linking Actors, Instruments and Policies through Networks](#): [CORDIS](#) (06/2018-11/2021)
- [ZeroW - Systemic Innovations Towards a Zero Food Waste Supply Chain](#): [CORDIS](#) (01/2022-12/2025)
- [ModernAKIS - Modernisation of Agriculture through more efficient and effective Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems website](#) - [CORDIS](#) (09/2022 - 08/2029)

### Horizon multi-actor projects working on skills and lifelong learning and AKIS

- [EUREKA - European Knowledge repository for best agricultural practices](#): [CORDIS](#) (01/2020-12/2021)
- [FAIRshare - Farm Advisory digital Innovation tools Realised and Shared](#): [CORDIS](#) (11/2018-10/2023)
- [I2connect - Connecting advisers to boost interactive innovation in agriculture and forestry](#): [CORDIS](#) (11/2019-10/2024)
- [AgriDemo-F2F - Building an interactive AgriDemo-Hub community: enhancing farmer to farmer learning](#): [CORDIS](#) (01/2017-06/2019)
- [4D4F - Data Driven Dairy Decisions 4 Farmers](#): [CORDIS](#) (03/2016-02/2019)
- [EURAKNOS - Connecting Thematic Networks as Knowledge Reservoirs: towards a European Agricultural Knowledge Innovation Open Source System](#): [CORDIS](#) (01/2019-12/2020)
- [PLAID - Peer-to-Peer Learning: Accessing Innovation through Demonstration](#): [CORDIS](#) (01/2017-06/2019)

**Multi-actor projects** are research projects in which end users and multipliers of research results, such as farmers and farmers' groups, advisors, enterprises and others, closely cooperate throughout the whole project. Operational Groups are strongly encouraged to participate in this type of research project.

**Thematic networks** are multi-actor projects which collect existing knowledge and best practices on a given theme to make it available in easily understandable formats for end users such as farmers, foresters, advisors etc.

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### Research needs from practice on skills and lifelong learning and AKIS

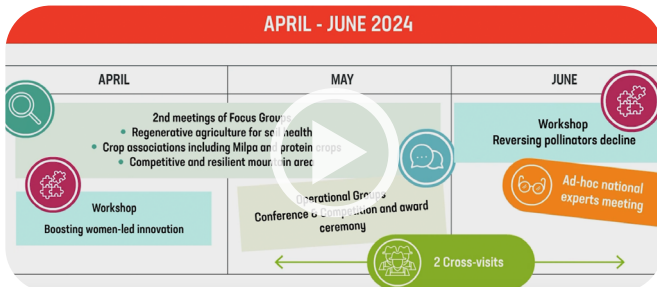
- Innovation support: a specifically recognised discipline of advice, preferably even an organisationally separate branch of the advisory service with their own set of requirements concerning training and experience. Innovation support skills can be trained but funding is needed. Experience from innovation support services tells us that there is the need to have expertise in both the subject matter and in brokerage/facilitation ([source](#) Seminar AKIS 2020).
- Participants at the [EIP-AGRI Seminar New Skills for Digital Farming](#) highlighted a list of competences and skills that farmers would need to effectively take advantage of the digital transformation:
  - Attitude and open-mindedness
  - Comprehensive management
  - Communication and collaboration
  - 'Bridging'
  - Digital literacy
  - Advanced digital skills
- Participants at the [EIP-AGRI Seminar New Skills for Digital Farming](#) listed an array of competence sources/providers and means/tools. Almost all the sources that were mentioned belong to one of the following:
  - The (extended) farming community
  - Advisors
  - Educational and training organisations
  - Farm suppliers
  - Agricultural organisations

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## Innovation, knowledge exchange and EIP-AGRI events 2023-2024

- > **Brokerage event:** [EU CAP Network Brokerage event 'Accelerating the innovation process through Horizon Europe multi-actor projects'](#), 19-20 October 2023 – Antwerp, Belgium
- > **Focus Group** meetings on:
  - > [Regenerative agriculture for soil health](#)
  - > [Crop associations including Milpa and protein crops](#)
  - > [Competitive and resilient mountain areas](#)
- > **Workshop:** [National networking for innovation](#), 30 November-1 December 2023 – Tallinn, Estonia
- > **Workshop:** [Circular water management](#), 12-13 March 2024 *(Call closed 11/12/2023)*
- > **Workshop:** Boosting women-led innovation, 17-18 April 2024 *(Call closed 05/02/2024)*
- > **Workshop:** [Promoting pollinator-friendly farming](#), 18-19 June 2024 (Call open until 29 February 2024)
- > **Seminar:** [Skills and lifelong learning](#), 21-22 February 2024 – Vienna, Austria
- > **Conference & award ceremony** focusing on Operational Groups, 6-8 May 2024 *(Call closed 08/02/2024)*
- > **Cross-visits** (May/June 2024)
- > **Ad-hoc national experts meeting** (June 2024)

## Related videos



[Innovation and Knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI events in 2023-2024](#)



[EIP-AGRI Video: AKIS - Building effective knowledge flows across Europe](#)

## The Common Agricultural Policy 2023-2027

[Common Agricultural Policy 2023-2027](#)

### Innovation, knowledge exchange and EIP-AGRI in the EU CAP Network

The European CAP Network 'Support Facility for Innovation & Knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI' acts as a mediator, enhancing communication and cooperation between everyone with a keen interest in innovation and sharing knowledge for sustainable agriculture, forestry and rural areas.

The European Innovation Partnership 'Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability' (EIP-AGRI) was launched in 2013 by the European Commission in a bid to promote rapid modernisation of the sectors concerned by efforts to step up innovation. The EIP-AGRI aims to

foster innovation in the agricultural and forestry sectors and in rural areas by bringing research and practice closer together – in innovation projects as well as via the European CAP Network and the national CAP Networks. Also, grassroots ideas from farmers are developed into concrete innovative solutions through 'Operational Group' innovation projects. The EIP-AGRI aims to streamline, simplify and better coordinate existing instruments and initiatives, and complement them with actions where necessary.

More information on [Innovation, knowledge exchange and EIP-AGRI](#) is available on the EU CAP Network website.

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### EIP-AGRI Operational Groups

EIP-AGRI Operational Groups **are groups of people who work together in an innovation project**. They bring together partners with complementary knowledge. The composition of the group will vary according to the theme and specific objectives of each project. Farmers, advisors, scientists, businesses or other relevant partners work together to find practical solutions to specific problems or opportunities for European farmers and foresters. Farmers and foresters need to cooperate throughout the project to ensure that the innovative solutions are practical and likely to be quickly applied in the field. Read the [basic principles](#). [Innovation support services](#) (including advisors with a focus on innovation), and in particular innovation brokering, can therefore play a crucial role in getting worthwhile projects off the ground by facilitating contacts.

### Operational Groups funded under Rural Development Programmes 2014 - 2022

- 98 Rural Development Programmes 2014-2020 (RDPs) provide support to innovative EIP-AGRI Operational Group projects
- More than 3 200 Operational Group projects have been notified in the common EU data repository and are currently ongoing (or already finished)\*. Member States will still start more Operational Group projects, which may run until 2025 (under current transitional rules for EU Rural Development Programmes). Find information on all of these projects in the [EIP-AGRI project database](#).

\* May 2023

### Operational Groups funded under CAP Strategic Plans 2023 - 2027

Within the Common Agricultural Policy 2023-27 (CAP), EU Member States have designed national CAP Strategic Plans combining funding for income support, rural development and market measures. All CAP Strategic Plans have been adopted and their implementation started on 1 January 2023.

26 CAP Strategic Plans include support for innovative EIP-AGRI Operational Groups. In total, 6 600 EIP-AGRI Operational Group projects have been planned.

