



Nurturing Skills for a Thriving and Sustainable Agricultural Sector

Thematic Group - 2nd meeting

The event offered extensive opportunities for exchanges based on Thematic Group (TG) members' experiences and building on the first TG meeting and informal online meetings. The mix of theoretical knowledge and practical, hands-on experience enriched the debate and fostered lively discussions that led to action-oriented recommendations.



An interactive quiz was used to introduce participants while testing their understanding of the TG discussions so far and their involvement. This created a warm atmosphere that helped to facilitate the upcoming group debate.

Presentation of Example Approaches and discussion

Agricultural economist **Andrew Moxey** presented an overview of possible activities that can be organised to develop and update skills for farmers and agri-food workers. Examples included demonstration farms, exchange visits, professional advice, and collaboration through Producer Organisations (POs). His presentation highlighted the advantages, suitable scenarios and challenges associated with each approach and included practical examples from different EU countries based on both analytical research and experience on the ground.

For all these approaches, success factors include: the need to better communicate the advantages of participation to farmers and agri-food workers ('what's in it for them'); and the need to overcome barriers such as a resistance to or lack of trust in institutions.

Prioritising and selecting the most relevant type of activity for skills development is crucial; employing a 'toolbox approach' is recommended. This involves making a variety of options for skill development accessible to the agri-food sector, so that farmers can choose the best approach to respond to their skills development needs. Importantly, as the skills required for the agri-food sector

Event Information

Date: 16 January 2024

Location: EU CAP Network premises, Brussels

Organisers: CAP Implementation Contact Point (CAP ICP)

Participants: 23 participants from 15 EU Member States, including Managing Authorities (MAs), National Networks (NNs), European organisations, farmers and farmer organisations, the European Commission, national/regional stakeholder organisations and researchers.

Outcomes: Sharing best practices, involving participants in discussions to identify tools for skills enhancement (including the role of the CAP) and drawing up action-oriented recommendations for policymakers.

Web page: [2nd meeting of the Thematic Group on Nurturing Skills for a Thriving and Sustainable Agricultural Sector](#)

continue to evolve, so the mechanisms and tools for skills provision should evolve in turn.



The presentation prompted a lively interchange between participants raising several pertinent issues related to skills development in agriculture. The challenge of identifying and tailoring initiatives to the specific needs of farmers is seen as critical. Potential solutions include considering the economic performance of a region in order to identify the most suitable initiatives for skills development and establishing a dialogue with and within farmer organisations.

The discussion also delved into the complexity of securing resources for information, training, and advice delivery. Participants expressed concerns over time-consuming access to public funding and mentioned the potential need for a mix of public and private funding sources.



Reporting key messages from the informal TG exchanges

Three TG members [reported](#) on various further activities within the TG framework.



Elena Ambühl (Agroecology Europe) facilitated an informal online TG meeting on 8 November 2023, focusing on the skills needed to respond to changing societal demands for farmers. The discussion underscored the shift towards environmentally responsible agriculture and the need to enable the transition of new generations of farmers and agricultural workers. Key concerns expressed by participants included: safe working conditions for seasonal workers, fair remuneration, gender balance, and better representation of women. The development of territorial food value chains connecting producers and consumers – and the development of related skills for agri-food professionals – was identified as contributing to a solution for many issues. The discussion emphasised the essential contribution of cooperatives and POs in promoting skills development, particularly key skills such as adaptability, horizontal skills, and interpersonal abilities (ranging from networking to storytelling).



Billy Goodburn (ICOS) led an informal online TG meeting on 13 December 2023 focusing on knowledge transfer across generations. Participating TG members highlighted the difficulty of involving young individuals in agriculture and of addressing demographic changes, such as rural depopulation. Potential solutions include advancing digital and technological literacy and cooperation, developing succession planning programmes, and designing innovative methods to promote engagement. Additional skills such as awareness raising, marketing, communication, flexible thinking, and the need for bridging the rural-urban gap were also identified as relevant for intergenerational knowledge transfer.

The potential solutions and steps forward identified during these informal meetings provided a useful basis for discussion during the 2nd TG meeting, aiming to explore 'how' to achieve these objectives.



Tom Jones (ERCA) reported on the meeting of the [EU CAP Network's CAP Strategic Plans Implementation Subgroup](#), that took place on 9 November 2023. Subgroup members completed a survey on 'How can skills development in agriculture be improved with the CAP implementation?' The replies collected highlighted the importance of training on diverse topics, which vary considerably across the EU. Tom Jones stressed the need for awareness, skills, and engagement

for the entire farm team, not just the farm owner. To this end, skills provision must consider individual needs and starting points, and simplification of and greater flexibility in CSP measures could contribute to this. National AKIS coordination bodies are crucial to ensure CAP activities focus on the right areas.

Interactive session: Working towards action-oriented recommendations



Ahead of the meeting, all TG members (including those not able to attend the event) were asked to write down their suggested action-oriented recommendations to improve skills in the EU agri-food sector. The key TG outcomes (from activities so far, i.e. the first meeting and two informal meetings) were summed up in a [poster](#), prepared as the starting point for the interactive group sessions.

Participants, split into three teams, had ample time for in-depth discussions. This allowed them to present, compare and fine-tune their own recommendations, and each group could then prioritise a set of suggestions to share with the other TG members.

During the final plenary discussions, participants gathered to discuss and further refine a selection of eight action-oriented recommendations, which constitute a key outcome of the meeting and will be published as a [TG output](#).

The action-oriented recommendations, which are directed at different levels of policymaking, aim to address specific steps and conditions necessary for improving skills. Each recommendation outlines concrete measures, key actors to be involved, enabling factors, and the expected benefits.

Conclusions

In their concluding remarks, participants acknowledged the networking and new connections enabled by the TG and the inspiring discussions. There was a call for sustained active engagement in EU opportunities, fostering collaboration with a shared responsibility for implementation, and a keen interest in understanding the next steps. The meeting offered a broader perspective, and participants were encouraged to apply the knowledge gained through the TG in their own projects and activities. In his final remarks, David Lamb (EU CAP Network) stressed the effectiveness of the [Thematic Groups](#) in bringing diverse perspectives together and the commitment to focus on the priorities identified by stakeholders. The meeting ended on a positive note, with participants eager to implement insights and contribute to ongoing agricultural dialogue.