

Design and Implementation of Eco-schemes in the new CAP Strategic Plans

Thematic Group - 2nd meeting

The **second meeting** of the Thematic Group (TG) allowed members to build on the topics discussed during four informal group discussions between TG meetings, and to draft solutions to the identified issues and recommendations for improving the design and implementation of eco-schemes.

Welcome messages and introduction to the day




After a short welcome by **Eirini Litina (EU CAP Network)**, **Léon van de Pol (DG AGRI)** welcomed the group on behalf of the European Commission and highlighted the importance of the discussions with TG members to improve eco-schemes. He stressed the importance of looking at both short and long-term improvements. Short-term improvements could include how to reduce the administrative burden for farmers, how eco-schemes could be better targeted, and how eco-schemes could be integrated better into the Green Architecture. From a long-term perspective, questions to be considered include how to use the eco-scheme budget more efficiently and effectively to ensure it provides added value when supporting farmers in their transition to adopting more sustainable and ecological practices.

Reporting back from the informal sessions between Thematic Group meetings



Since the **first TG meeting** on 25 October, four informal, member-driven online group discussions were organised and facilitated by members of the TG. All four discussions were very active and well attended (20-26 participants in each session). The facilitators reported back the key messages from each session to the whole group:

 **Christos Karatzas (Agreaos, Greece)** presented the discussions on *How to raise awareness of eco-schemes* (29 November 2023). Topics addressed during the informal session included the efficient use of different actors and communication channels, the identification of farmers' needs in relation to the implementation of eco-schemes, understanding farmers' response to specific schemes, as well as the use of digital tools, platforms and mobile applications.

Event Information

Date: 20 February 2024

Location: Brussels, EU CAP Network premises


Organisers: EU CAP Network


Participants: 34 participants from 16 EU Member States, including farmers and farmers' organisations, advisors, Managing Authorities (MAs), National Networks (NNs), Environmental NGOs, European and national/regional stakeholder organisations, farm advisors and the European Commission (DG AGRI).

Outcomes: Recommendations on improvements and the way forward for the design and implementation of eco-schemes in Member States.

Web page: [2nd meeting of the Thematic Group on the Design and Implementation of Eco-schemes in the new CAP Strategic Plans](#)

 **Christian Gaebel (COPA and DBV, Deutscher Bauernverband, Germany)** reported back on the informal session (13 December 2023) addressing the *Administration of eco-schemes*. Member States and stakeholders reported issues with the application procedure, controls and with setting payment rates so that the eco-schemes were attractive to farmers.

 **Fenna van Selm (Ministry of Agriculture, the Netherlands)** gave an overview of the informal discussion on *Eco-schemes and their interaction with the Green Architecture* (10 January 2024). The focus was on how eco-schemes are designed in relation to other elements of the Green Architecture (e.g. conditionality and agri-environment-climate schemes). Members reflected on the challenges they faced to keep things simple for farmers and administrations, securing good levels of uptake as well as ambition.

 **Anja Techen (Ministry of Agriculture, Germany)** reported on the fourth and final informal discussion addressing *Targeting/Regionalising eco-schemes* (24 January 2024). The outcome of this discussion was that there are varying approaches taken to target eco-schemes in different regions, such as by different production systems and/or soil types or designated areas (Natura 2000 areas, Nitrate Vulnerable Zones), as well as to enable a better fit with more regionalised agri-environmental interventions.

1st round of parallel group sessions: Draft solutions to the issues raised on the informal sessions' four topics



In the first interactive session, TG members were split into three groups and rotated through three breakout rooms to discuss: I) Eco-schemes and their interaction with other elements of Green Architecture; II) Administration and targeting of eco-schemes; and III) Raising awareness of eco-schemes. TG members were asked to add any additional relevant issues to those identified during the informal discussions for each topic and to identify possible solutions to overcome these issues.

Solutions identified included:



Green Architecture: avoid designing interventions in isolation and consider their combined impact on the environment, as well as economic and social dimensions. Improve the co-existence with agri-environmental commitments.



Administrative issues and targeting: aim at greater flexibility to make budgetary changes within the administrative year; streamline administrative requirements; find ways to allow a greater incentive element in payment rates; and, find a balance between achieving high environmental ambition and realising good levels of uptake so that simplification does not lead to low environmental ambition.



Raising awareness and uptake of eco-schemes: the need to provide information on the environmental and economic benefits of eco-schemes; providing beneficiaries and other actors locally with guidance on how eco-schemes work; provision of best practice Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools; and, learning from the experiences of farmers.

2nd round of parallel group sessions: The way forward for eco-schemes - Recommendations for successful design and implementation



In the second interactive session, TG members were asked to propose recommendations on the way forward for eco-schemes, and to identify who needs to take action, e.g. the European Commission (EC), Member States' Managing Authorities (MA). The **key recommendations** included:

I) Improve the sharing of information with and among different actors and strengthen Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) (EC and MAs); II) Scale up peer-to-peer learning and demonstration activities (MAs); III) Put in place structures to encourage scheme co-design with farmers and build trust across all actors in the value chain (EC, MAs); IV) Set up help desks to establish direct lines of communication with farmers and advisors (MAs); V) Explore the possibility of "package approaches" to simplify the application process where farmers choose from a suite of suitable practices/measures, without needing to know the funding source/intervention type (MAs) VI) Facilitate the sharing of best practices between Member States, i.e. for ICT tools (EC, MAs); VII) Allow greater flexibility to shift funds between environmental interventions according to uptake and to ensure budgetary certainty for farmers (EC, MAs); VIII) Ensure participation in schemes addressing basic environmental needs with top-up options for increased environmental ambition (MAs); IX) Consider certification systems for sustainable farming systems to encourage additional financial reward from the market (EC, MAs); and, X) Reflect on the need for two CAP 'Pillars' or funds as part of the discussions on the future CAP (EC, MAs).

Next steps and closing remarks

EU CAP Network and TG members will draft a fact sheet with the lessons learnt and recommendations on the way forward for the design and implementation of eco-schemes. The EU CAP Network is also organising a new [TG on Green Architecture](#) which will assess the strategies taken by Member States to address their environmental and climate needs. Outcomes from the TG on eco-schemes will feed into these discussions.