

EU CAP Network Subgroup on Innovation & Knowledge Exchange

Report

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Welcome and introduction

Hugo Almeida, Deputy Head of Unit D1 'Rural areas and Networks', DG AGRI

Hugo Almeida opened the meeting introducing the new EU CAP Network governance structure. He explained that the Subgroup on Innovation and Knowledge Exchange (SOIKE) is currently working in a transitional mode, particularly in respect to its composition, which will be updated after the first meeting of the new European CAP Network Assembly.

The opening presentation included also some updates on the latest EU CAP Network activities linked to Innovation and Knowledge Exchange, namely the workshop "Young entrepreneurs - Engines of innovation in rural areas", the seminar "Smart circular farming to address high energy and fertiliser prices", the brokerage event "Getting involved in Horizon Europe advisory networks" and the ongoing Focus Groups. The overview was completed with a presentation of the latest communication materials that have been published since the last SolKE meeting in October 2022. A reference to the upcoming communication deliverables concluded this outline.

Hugo Almeida finished his presentation by informing SOIKE members about current number of Operational Groups (OGs) registered to the System for Fund Management in the European Union (SFC). Since the last SolKE meeting this number had risen by 140 to 2720 OGs.

You can find his presentation [here](#).

Orsolya Frizon Somogyi, Deputy Head of Unit F2 'Research and Innovation', DG AGRI

Orsolya Frizon Somogyi provided an update on the latest developments in Horizon Europe.

She informed that the evaluation of 2022 calls for Cluster 6 Work Programme 2021-2022 has finished and highlighted some relevant projects that are to start soon or have just started under the topic 'Broaden EIP Operational Group outcomes across borders by means of thematic networks, compiling and sharing knowledge ready for practice' ([GOFORRESTS](#) and [NUTRI-KNOW](#)) and under the topic 'Thematic networks to compile and share knowledge ready for practice' ([AF4EU](#), [NUTRI-CHECK NETWORK](#), [ResAlliance](#), [EUNetHorse](#)).

She proceeded to inform the Subgroup that calls for Cluster 6 Work Programme 2023 are currently open and the deadlines for applications are 23 March and 12 April 2023. A brochure summarising the current open calls is available [here](#).

Orsolya Frizon Somogyi continued with updates on the Horizon Europe Mission 'Soil Deal for Europe' and an overview on the projects funded under the first call in 2021 ([PREPSOIL](#), [SOLO](#), [BENCHMARKS](#), [AI4SoilHealth](#), [SOIL O-LIVE](#), [InBestSoil](#),



[NOVASOIL](#), [SoilValues](#), [HuMUS](#), [NATI00NS](#), [NBSoil](#)). She also informed that the Soil Mission 2023 Call for proposals is now open until 23 September 2023, providing an overview on the topics.

Before finishing her presentation, Orsolya Frizon Somogyi shared the timeline for the preparation of the Horizon Europe Strategic Plan 2025-2027 and promoted the upcoming [AgriResearch Conference](#) on 31 May – 1 June 2023.

You can find her presentation [here](#).

The two presentations were followed by a Q&A:

Q: What content is expected in the EU CAP Network Agrinnovation magazine? Do we have to subscribe somewhere to receive it? Can we propose content?

A: We are open to receive contributions and our stakeholders are welcome to make suggestions. We consider all the proposals as long as they are in line with the Communication Plan and the scope of the EU CAP network. You can [subscribe to the EU CAP Newsletter](#). Content proposals can be sent to innovation.knowledge@eucapnetwork.eu.

Q: Were all the young farmers participating in the workshop in Dublin CEJA members?

A: For sure not all participants were CEJA Members, even though we were not checking that particular element. The aim was to have a variety of stakeholders and thus the participants were also researchers, advisors, and other types of actors.

Session I: Introduction to the BCO Network and digital connectivity

Jan Dröge, Team Leader, BCO Support Facility, presented the European Broadband Competence Offices Network to SOIKE members. He firstly introduced the overall context, highlighting that there cannot be innovation in rural areas without good connectivity, emphasizing the need for proactive policies and progressive ambition when addressing connectivity issues. The BCOs have a role in understanding market failure areas through mapping and identifying underserved areas, to then propose policies to address them and to design agreements with private operators or to potentially subsidize investments in these underserved areas. In the 2021-2027 EU budgetary period there are over €16 billion in public funding planned for investments in connectivity and broadband rollout in the 27 Member States.

Jan Dröge described also what the BCO network is and how it can intervene, explaining that the main objective of the network is to bring connectivity to everyone in Europe, including rural. He finalized pointing out that the BCO Support Facility produces many publications and other communication materials, which can be found on [the DG Connect website](#).



You can find his presentation [here](#).

The presentation was followed by a Q&A:

Q: What is the best way to create more synergies between the funds to speed up connectivity? Maybe first important steps?

A: There has to be a proven market failure and lack of interest from private operators to invest in a particular area. The first step is to do a mapping exercise – identifying what infrastructures are available and what investments are planned by the private sector.

Q: According to the BCO Network Directory there is no BCO in Romania. Do you know if there are any discussions to address this gap in the network?

A: The gap has been filled. There is an active member in the Ministry of Research.

Q: Do you believe that in 2030 100mbps connectivity is fast enough in most households or businesses?

A: It is possible that in many cases it will be not enough. We cannot predict what 2030 will look like but it is likely that for farms, like for many other industries in the future, trials will take place in virtual environments where scenarios will be tested virtually before they are applied in the field. This virtualisation will require much faster speeds to be able to connect to the data centres that make the calculations.

Session II: Main results from the EC's event 'Farming's got talent! Vocational education and training for agriculture in transition'

Fabio Cossu, Unit 'A1 - Policy Perspectives', DG AGRI, presented the outcomes of the EC's [event 'Farming's Got Talent!](#)' - aiming at highlighting the role of vocational education and training (VET) to enable an attractive farming sector, and identify priorities and successful approaches for the development of the right skill set.

There were several takeaway messages. Firstly, VET should be recognised as full-fledged agricultural policy tools which could respond to the immediate changes in the agricultural sector but also act as catalysts of change in the long-term. To foster this role of VET, there is a need to gain insights into real situation on skills and labour shortages in the agri-food sector. Secondly, the agri-food sector workforce is very diverse calling for a targeted approach in skills development and delivery. From a territorial approach, agricultural education centres can be facilitators of knowledge provision and knowledge exchange on a local scale. Thirdly, from a policy perspective, the focus should be on removing barriers to learning which requires an integrated approach starting at the level of public administration. There is also a margin for



improving and discovering synergies between existing policy tools. Finally, making vocational training more effective also includes strengthening advisory services, peer-to-peer learning and the necessity to make training more practical.

Fabio Cossu finished his presentation by highlighting that there are tools in CAP Strategic Plans which aim to deliver on skills, specifically through vocational training, while there is a need to include education into Agriculture Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS). Tools such as EIP-AGRI OGs are already in place to bring together different actors in delivering new knowledge and skills to farmers, but educational actors should be involved more actively.

You can find his presentation [here](#).

The presentation was followed by a Q&A:

Q: What will be the follow up activities in DG AGRI of this interesting event? Further events maybe or new elements of future CAP interventions?

A: Currently this is being considered and will hopefully be taken up by the EU CAP Network.

Q: Could missing continued education be due to difficulties in leaving the work in the farm?

A: Time to dedicate and engage in training programmes is indeed one of the biggest challenges for adult farmers. It could be possible to take this to farms.

Q: It would be nice to compare the Member States' CAP Strategic Plans on the content and budget part reserved for measure I.78 Knowledge Exchange?

A: A summary overview of the 27 CAP Strategic Plans is already completed¹, and a more in-depth “mapping” exercise is ongoing, paving the way to the EC report to the Council and the Parliament due by the end of the year.

Session III: Future networking activities on innovation and knowledge exchange

Magdalena Mach, Unit D1 - Rural areas and networks', DG AGRI, opened the session by presenting clusters of ideas for future networking activities. Collected from SOIKE members, EIP-AGRI SF team and other stakeholders from the network, the ideas were compiled in a booklet shared with all SOIKE members prior to the meeting. Magdalena Mach then explained that the aim of the session was to rank these topics, thus contributing to the creation of the Annual Work Programme (AWP) 2023-2024.

¹ Published on 24 April 2023 and available on the Europa website at this page: https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/cap-my-country/cap-strategic-plans-country_en



She stressed the importance of selecting topics suitable for networking activities that bring together different types of stakeholders to discuss practical solutions to challenges faced by farmers and to further foster knowledge exchange.

You can find her presentation [here](#).

The Subgroup members were then invited to prioritise topics from each cluster for further discussion and elaboration in breakouts. The number of topics that would be taken up per cluster varied between 2 and 3, depending on the number of ideas collected under each cluster. The only exception were clusters A and F where all topics were included for discussion due to the lower number of ideas collected and/or because some could be aggregated in the same activity.

The results of the prioritisation exercise together with the division of topics into different breakout rooms are shown in Figure 1.

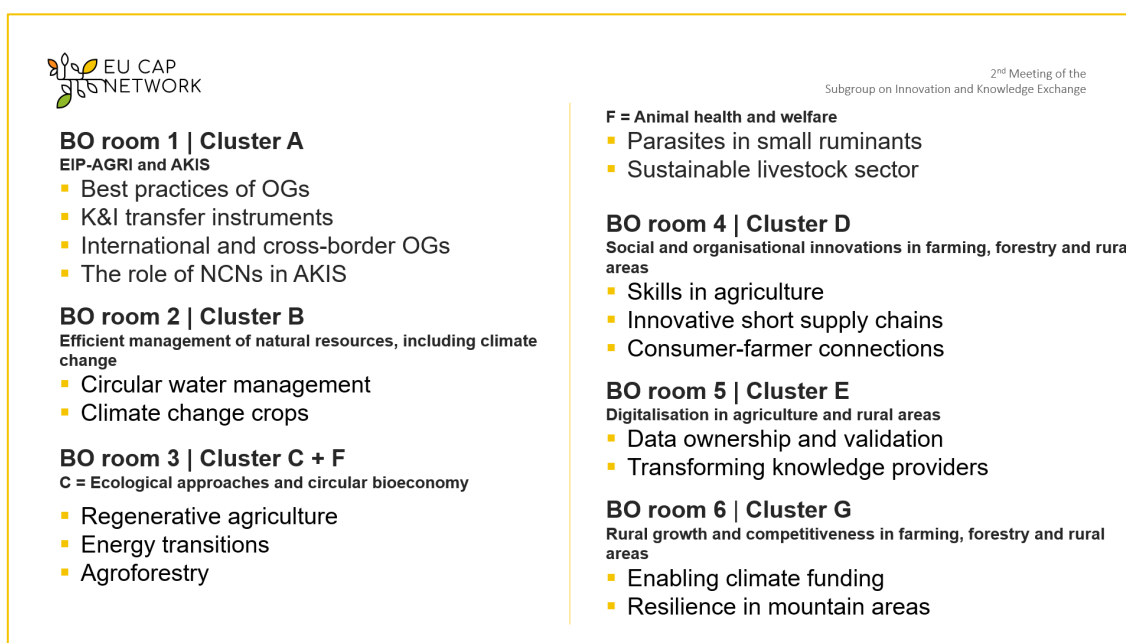


Figure 1. Topics for discussion in breakout rooms

Discussions in breakout sessions were based on the question ‘What could be the scope of the networking activity under this topic?’, while also collecting inputs regarding possible objectives and type of activity.



After the interactive session, rapporteurs from each breakout shared the main points of the discussions, in plenary:

Cluster A: EIP-AGRI and AKIS

Participants agreed that all four topics could be covered by two networking activities.

One of these activities could focus exclusively on the role of National CAP Networks (NCNs) in AKIS. Such an activity could explore the potential of NCNs for fostering knowledge exchange, supporting cross-border exchanges and interactions with Horizon Europe. It could also serve as a forum for NCNs to share their needs and challenges in respect to their role in AKIS.

The general agreement was that the first three topics could be covered under the same activity. The topics on best practices of OGs and international and cross-border OGs can be directly interlinked. A suggestion was made that lessons learned from LEADER transnational cooperation could benefit future cross-border OGs, and so there is scope for presentations on successful examples of international projects. The topic on knowledge and innovation transfer instruments could act as a complementary module to this potential networking activity. Additionally, addressing this topic could create opportunities to explore the links and possibilities for cooperation between living labs, OGs and Horizon Europe projects.

Cluster B: Efficient management of natural resources, including climate change

Two topics were prioritised under this cluster: circular water management and climate change crops.

When addressing the first topic, breakout participants highlighted its importance, and the possible link to water quality issue. Discussions were based on how circular water management can be put into practice, more specifically at farm level. Additional attention should be given to addressing the impact of water extraction for agriculture from rivers. Different types of networking activities were considered. A seminar could incorporate good practice examples, field visits and presentations of relevant projects, such as [Water2Return](#). A Focus Group could be centred on technologies to be used in circular water management.

The second topic was discussed focusing on the introduction of new crops or cropping methods in light of climate change. Breakout participants agreed on the high relevance of the topic especially in connection to the F2F strategy and the EU Green Deal. Again, different types of networking activities were considered. Tackling the topic from a broader perspective could be done through a workshop, which would involve presentations of good practices from existing projects, as well as showcasing



alternative agricultural and breeding techniques. A Focus Group would require a narrower view on the topic, either targeting a selection of crops and cropping techniques, or new crops for feeding livestock as an approach to circularity.

Cluster C: Ecological approaches and circular bioeconomy, and Cluster F: Animal Welfare

The three topics prioritised for Cluster C were: regenerative agriculture, energy transitions in agriculture and agroforestry.

To tackle the topic regenerative agriculture (RA) developing a common understanding of the concept is needed as a starting point. Besides, it can be linked to agroecology and the [SCAR SWG on Agroecology](#), and to the [EU Mission 'A Soil Deal for Europe'](#). Possible networking activities include a seminar or a Focus Group if the context would be more specific.

Energy transitions in agriculture was not envisioned as a stand-alone topic, instead participants suggested to take it up in combination with one of the other two topics. As a follow up to the EU CAP Network [seminar 'Smart circular farming to address high energy and fertiliser prices'](#) which focused on energy and agriculture, a workshop addressing energy and forestry could be organised. An additional topic which could be included in the same activity is agricultural activity together with photovoltaic systems (AGRI-PV), which was proposed under Cluster B.

A Focus Group on agroforestry has already been organised, however it was centred on agroforestry farming systems (field-based perspective). Alternatively, a new Focus Group could explore agroforestry value chains and markets. This activity could be inspirational for OGs working in the field of agroforestry. [AF4EU](#) is a recent Horizon Thematic Network focusing on the commercial and value chain development of agroforestry. A larger networking activity for such topic is less feasible due to the small number of OGs dealing with agroforestry, most of which are focused on field-management level.

Alternatively, participants agreed that the three topics are interrelated and an event addressing all of them could be considered as a way to explore synergies between them.

The two topics under Cluster F, on animal welfare are unlikely to be taken up in the AWP 2023-2024 as the current programme already includes [EU CAP Network Workshop 'Animal welfare and innovation' with similar main topic](#). However, the



workshop outcomes can be taken up to identify the needs and possibilities for future activities within this context.

Cluster D: Social and organisational innovations in farming, forestry and rural areas

The three main topics prioritised for discussion under Cluster D were skills in agriculture, innovative short supply chains, and consumer-farmer connections.

Breakout participants agreed that digital, technical and soft skills are key at farm level. Farmers and agricultural workers need to develop their ability to utilise digital instruments and technical tools, as well as their capacity for leadership and emotional intelligence.

The other two topics were considered to be closely interconnected. In respect to innovative supply chains, the importance of bringing farmers to the core of such practices was brought up. A workshop was proposed as a suitable activity, where good practices could be showcased, especially in terms of the whole business model (including logistics, marketing, branding). Discussions in the breakout included the concept of short supply chains where processes behind products' sales would be explained to the consumer (environmental aspects, local food production, jobs in rural areas), as well as the role of direct sales and possible tools and approaches which would support interactions between farmers and consumers. Local authorities were introduced as important actors in facilitating consumer-farmer connections as they hold the tools to organise local-level selling points and markets. Schools were also mentioned as key points in bringing consumers and farmers closer together, besides that children need educational campaigns for a better understanding on issues such as "Where does the food come from?".

Cluster E: Digitalisation in agriculture and rural areas

Two topics were prioritised under this cluster: data ownership and validation, and transforming knowledge providers.

In respect to the first topic, participants suggested a Focus Group as the most suitable activity where two main objectives could be tackled. Firstly, to examine the challenges and benefits of data ownership and accessibility in agriculture, as well as presenting good practices. Farmers need to be encouraged to exchange data, but this is based on trust. Technical solutions for exchanging data and blockchain technology should be taken into account. Besides, exploring the potential challenges and risks associated to sharing data with third-party providers should also be considered. Secondly, the Focus Group could explore methods for improving data collection and validation in agriculture by identifying ways to improve the accuracy and reliability of data generated by farmers, including methods for data validation and cross-referencing.



Strategies for integrating data from different sources (e.g. weather data, crop yield data) and approaches for standardizing data would also be aspects to take into account. The role of data analytics and data security was also considered to be important.

When discussing the topic on transforming knowledge providers, it was agreed that a Focus Group would also be the most suitable networking activity, covering two possible objectives. Firstly, to identify digital skills needed for agriculture knowledge providers to effectively support farmers in adopting new technologies and managing their operations - knowledge providers should be ready to train and support farmers in this regard. Current skills gaps and the way to close them would also be taken in consideration. Secondly, to co-create solutions to transform knowledge providers by encouraging partnerships and collaborations between various stakeholders including farmers, experts and others. Developing new and targeted training and support programs, as well as innovative approaches to build these alliances to improve the delivery of knowledge services, could also be considered by the Focus Group.

Cluster G: Rural growth and competitiveness in farming, forestry and rural areas

The two topics taken up for discussion under this cluster were: resilience in mountain areas, and enabling climate funding.

During discussions on the first topic, the diversity of mountain areas both in geographical and socio-economic terms was acknowledged. Key issues that mountainous rural areas are facing are environmental, as well as the impacts of climate change such as extreme events and changing tourism patterns (e.g. shorter winter season), which affect the resilience, competitiveness, wellbeing and way-of-life of communities in these areas. Innovation and digitalization can help to share experiences and overcome challenges originated by remoteness. The issue of generational renewal could possibly be addressed by analysing how young farmers can be incentivized to relocate and take mountain-based farms. Trends of repopulation are already taking place following the COVID-19 pandemic, however additional economic opportunities should be explored. Projects such as [WECHO](#) and [SIMRA](#) are already working towards providing solutions and innovative examples of good practices.

In respect to the second topic, participants agreed that climate-friendly farming is already a well-developed topic, already covered by existing policies and funds (e.g. development of environmental footprint regulations).



Session IV: “AOB & News from the Subgroup members”

The session started with a presentation by one of the Subgroup members **Leonie Göbel, German Rural Network**, who presented the main highlights from their recent publication ‘Working towards the agriculture of the future: EIP-AGRI in Germany’. The magazine is available in English and can be found [here](#). It focuses on the experiences with EIP-AGRI in Germany during the first funding period. Leonie introduced the structure of the magazine and presented the composition of German OGs, and the thematic areas they are covering. OGs are listed in the German EIP-AGRI database and available in English [here](#).

Leonie then highlighted the role of the NRN/national CAP Network in disseminating OGs results through regional and national events, in organising thematic workshops and an annual workshop that brings together all German OGs – next one will take place in November 2023. Lastly, she referred to the role of the innovation brokers, which is key to the successful implementation of EIP-AGRI in Germany.

You can find her presentation [here](#).

The presentation was followed by a Q&A session:

Q: Do you facilitate the dissemination of OG results by webinar for instance? Is this part of the thematic events?

A: Thematic workshops allow OGs to discuss certain topics and create new projects, they are not only about the presentation of their results. Organising webinars would be interesting, but there are many OGs, so organising webinars would be difficult. Every month the CAP Network disseminates information from the EIP-AGRI database on newly formed OGs or on results of OGs that have ended.

The floor was then opened to other members of the Subgroup interested in sharing their activities:

- **Jennie Cederholm Björklund, Swedish Rural Network**, presented the [Swedish LinkedIn page on EIP-AGRI and AKIS](#). She explained that in mid-January 2023, the Swedish National CAP Network took the initiative to promote knowledge sharing and information dissemination via social media. The LinkedIn page provides information on conferences, trainings and other activities, but also about funding opportunities for research or other projects, improving the visibility of AKIS actors in order to further promote collaboration. The results of EIP-AGRI projects are shared, as well as calls and deadlines for



applications, updates are communicated shared by the Swedish CAP Network and other AKIS actors.

- **Krzysztof Janiak, Agricultural Advisory Center in Brwinów, Poland**, informed the Subgroup members that the number of Polish OGs registered in the SFC database is 88 but, in reality, there are 312 OGs and this number might be even higher. He also explained that effort is being made to involve Polish OGs in Horizon Thematic Networks, as well as in other activities across borders. Krzysztof encouraged SOIKE members to contact Polish OGs and foster cross-border cooperation. A booklet with information on Polish OGs will be published in English very soon.
- **Tuomas Metsäniemi, Finnish Food Authority (Ruokavirasto)**, informed the Subgroup members that the National Rural Networks of Estonia, Finland and Latvia are working together and have organised a series of seven online thematic workshops called '[Network to Innovate](#)'.

Next steps and closing

Hugo Almeida thanked SOIKE members, speakers, DG AGRI colleagues and EIP-AGRI Support Facility team for the successful meeting. He underlined that the input from SOIKE members in respect to future networking activities will be analysed and will constitute one of the basis for drafting the next Annual Work Programme.

Hugo Almeida thanked SOIKE members for their contribution over the past years, as the next Subgroup meeting will take place with the group composition.



