



EIP-AGRI Operational Groups

Collaboration and funding opportunities



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Colophon

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Contents and editing: Support Facility for Innovation and Knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI

Layout: Communication and Logistical Support Team

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Pictures: © Adobe stock photo; CAP Network Ireland; EU CAP Network; Lithuanian CAP Network; NUTRI-KNOW; Operational Group ROBUSTAGNO; Piimaklaster/Estonian Dairy Cluster; Tuija Kallio/Finnish CAP Network.

Manuscript finalised April 2024 | Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2024

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Print: ISBN 978-92-68-16599-7, DOI 10.2762/764472, KF-09-24-359-EN-C

PDF: ISBN 978-92-68-16598-0, DOI 10.2762/285156, KF-09-24-359-EN-N



Boosting innovation across the EU

In EIP-AGRI Operational Group projects, farmers, foresters, researchers, advisors and other innovators work together to test grassroots innovative ideas and develop them into solutions that address real needs from practice.

More than 3 200 Operational Groups have been established across Europe since 2014, and about 6 600 more are planned under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) for 2023-2027. These projects can benefit from exchanging knowledge with other projects working on similar or complementary themes, advisors, researchers and businesses from national or European innovation ecosystems.

National CAP Networks, advisory organisations or EU-wide projects under the Horizon research and innovation programme can facilitate opportunities for Operational Groups to connect, nationally and across the EU. The CAP now even offers the chance to set up transnational Operational Groups.

This brochure highlights examples of collaboration, funding opportunities, support platforms and activities that can inspire National CAP Networks, Operational Groups and other innovators to connect and boost innovation across the EU.



What are Operational Groups and how can they collaborate to innovate? Find all the details **on the EU CAP Network website.**



Connecting Operational Groups

By connecting with other projects or innovators from national Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS), Operational Groups can gain new ideas on how to tackle a common challenge, expand their networks, share results more widely, and boost knowledge and innovation.

Connecting can take the form of simple phone calls or virtual interactions, or looking up information on other projects working on similar or complementary themes, for instance in national or European databases. Attending networking events or cross-visits can boost peer-to-peer learning and be the start of further collaboration.

Through CAP funding, National CAP Networks and advisory services can support Operational Groups in identifying similar projects or organising thematic or networking events.



Browse the EIP-AGRI project database to find innovative projects from across the EU that are developing solutions for agriculture, forestry and rural areas. This includes Operational Groups, and research and innovation projects such as Horizon multi-actor projects.





→ The Polish Innovation Network (SIR) has organised national and regional events where Operational Groups could network and present their results. Study tours brought researchers and Operational Groups together to explore potential future collaboration.

→ The Lithuanian CAP Network has invited (inter)national Operational Groups, researchers, advisors and other interested parties to 'contact fairs'. They formed a platform for projects to share best practices, discuss priority topics and explore new partnerships.



How does your country support Operational Groups under the CAP? Find info from your National CAP Network support unit **on the EU CAP Network website**.



Did you know?

Following a networking event by the Finnish National Rural Network (now Finnish CAP Network), Operational Groups '**Smart drinking bowl**' and '**Cybernetics in dairy cow feed optimisation**' explored solutions to common challenges through regular meetings. The projects organised a visit where a tool to measure water consumption for cows was tested on one of the Operational Groups' pilot farms.



Irish networking leads to new connections

Since 2016, the Irish National Rural Network (now CAP Network Ireland) has organised several workshops, webinars and networking events for national Operational Groups and their farmers.

James Claffey from the CAP Network Ireland said: "These events were a good platform for them to share knowledge in an informal way. They learnt that they could set up exchanges with other projects to discuss results and add to their project data – which is important for building expertise and capacity.



We mainly animated the start of their relationship but soon saw that groups organically formed based on common themes, for instance, those working on water and upland areas. They would organise study visits or farm walks and invite other Operational Groups, advisors and farmers. Some Operational Groups engaged with EU LIFE projects to tackle shared problems and avoid overlapping working areas or double funding. Some collaborations were set up to prepare submissions to help design Irish agri-environmental schemes.

Informal networking meetings give Operational Groups a chance to see what other projects deliver and whether they would make good partners. This basis of trust makes it easier to set up long-term collaboration."



In the COVID-19 period, two Slovenian Operational Groups on **pollination in fruit production** and **efficient water management** joined a virtual cross-border visit, **set up by the German Rural Network** (now German CAP Network).



Did you know?

Operational Groups can receive to organise networking events or cross-visits. These can be added to their project activity plans.

Portuguese and Italian Operational Groups 'MoreSoil' and 'Agroecological cover' have organised exchange visits to see shared solutions in practice. **Read more in the Agrinnovation magazine.**



Advisors play a key role in fostering connections between Operational Groups. The Horizon 2020 thematic network 'I2connect' has organised several learning visits to bring Operational Groups and advisors together to share expertise about the interactive innovation process. Such study visits have already been held in **Hungary, Spain and Latvia.**

→ Get more info on innovation support for Operational Groups **on the EU CAP Network website.**



The EU CAP Network regularly organises cross-visits for Operational Groups. The first cross-visits (June 2023) invited projects working on **circular soil management** and **organic value chain optimisation.**

Subscribe to the **Innovation & Knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI newsletter** to learn about future calls.

Watch: **4 reasons to join cross-visits**



New funding opportunities for collaboration across borders

The CAP (2023-2027) now offers the opportunity to form Operational Group projects across regional and national borders. Different regions within one country can work together in cross-border Operational Groups, while transnational Operational Groups can include different Member States in their partnerships.

These new forms of collaboration can help generate new insights and perspectives, address challenges that transcend borders, tap into regional needs, increase the chance of finding the right partners and share innovative results more widely across borders.

→ Find more information on transnational and cross-border Operational Groups **on the EU CAP Network website.**



What's going on in your country?

At the start of 2024, any potential transnational Operational Groups were still only in a planning phase.

Do you want to get more information on what is included in your country's CAP Strategic Plans? Would you like to get in touch with your country's Managing Authority or National CAP Network to hear more about future Operational Group calls?

→ Find information about your country **on the EU CAP Network website.**

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“Transnational and cross-border Operational Groups are a novelty under the new CAP. They present an opportunity to further develop innovative solutions and stimulate their uptake by European farmers, foresters, researchers, advisors and rural communities more widely across the EU. By making the most of international expertise, these Operational Groups can tackle challenges that do not end at regional or national borders.”

”

- Antonio Gámez Moreno
Head of Unit 'Rural areas and networks', DG AGRI, European Commission -



Fostering the next generation of Operational Groups

The EU CAP Network conference 'EIP-AGRI Operational Groups: Innovation in practice' (May 2024) celebrated the successes of Operational Groups across the EU. To support the next generation of Operational Group projects, conference participants discussed what is needed to establish transnational and cross-border Operational Groups, what such projects could look like and what Member States need to foster them.

→ **[Find all results and presentations from this event on the conference event page.](#)**



‘Network to innovate’ prepares first transnational Operational Group calls

Estonia and Finland have a good track record when it comes to stimulating collaboration between EIP-AGRI Operational Group projects. Since 2014, the countries’ National Rural Networks (now National CAP Networks) have organised various networking and matchmaking events, innovation markets and field visits where Operational Groups could exchange ideas, share results and explore potential collaboration.

Estonia has previously launched Operational Group calls welcoming cooperation partners from other Member States. A regional Nordic-Baltic network called ‘Network to innovate’ is now bringing this collaboration to the next level. The network is preparing calls for transnational Operational Groups involving Estonia, Finland and Latvia.

“We started planning the calls in 2023 and our goal is to launch them in 2025,” says Tuija Kallio from the Finnish CAP Network. “Preparing transnational calls requires a lot of planning to make sure they

are aligned in all participating Member States. Each country needs to launch the call individually and pay for its part through national CAP funding, but budgets, national regulations and country needs may differ.”

“With ‘Network to innovate’ we have organised innovation camps and hackathons to get Managing Authorities, Paying Agencies, National CAP Networks and AKIS coordination bodies of Estonia, Finland, Latvia and initially also Sweden together and set common goals. We need all of them involved to establish a smooth collaboration in launching the calls, to synchronise call timelines, and topics that tie in with national priority themes. Brokerage events are helping us get new innovative project ideas, collect lessons learnt from previous successful collaborations and bring potential project partners together to establish a successful joint call in 2025.”



→ Based on a signed cooperation agreement, Estonian **Operational Group MAVAS** has been working in close collaboration with Finnish **Operational Group SMARTFEED** (Älyrehu in Finnish) to find optimal solutions for the use of biosensors in dairy farming and other common challenges. All results were directly disseminated to the actively participating farmers, allowing them to learn from their peers and benefit from this collaboration across borders. **Read more.**



Benefitting from synergies with European networks

EIP-AGRI Operational Groups can increase the impact of their results by connecting with EU-wide networks. By engaging with Horizon multi-actor projects, including thematic networks and advisory networks, Operational Groups can contribute to a wider and faster uptake of knowledge and innovation across the EU.

Horizon Europe, the EU's largest research and innovation programme, offers funding to set up projects that develop innovative solutions through a close collaboration of researchers, advisors, farmers, foresters and rural communities.

Operational Group projects also have the opportunity to get involved in Horizon networks that use a 'multi-actor approach', such as multi-actor projects and thematic networks. Operational Groups can help define project goals from the very start, making sure that they tie in with needs from the field. They can

also contribute with their expertise and results, to ensure that the collected knowledge is up to date.

Horizon multi-actor projects are strongly recommended to connect with EIP-AGRI Operational Groups. This can help them collect results and best practices that have been developed nationally or regionally and streamline them with solutions that are found or still needed at European level. This synergy supports a better and faster uptake of innovative knowledge across the EU, at all levels.



Matchmaking for innovation

At EU CAP Network brokerage events, Operational Groups can learn more about calls for Horizon Europe projects, the EU Missions, or the newly established EU partnerships. These events allow them to get tips and tricks to prepare quality proposals, join matchmaking sessions and find partners to join or set up new partnerships.

- Keep an eye on the **newsletter for Innovation & Knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI** to hear about new calls to attend future brokerage events.



- The EU CAP Network regularly publishes an overview of needs or opportunities from practice that could benefit from further research. This can help new research projects meet actual needs from the field and facilitate a dialogue between research and practice. **Take a look at the latest report.**



French Operational Group Robustagno 2.0 and thematic network EuroSheep closely collaborated to improve sheep health across Europe.



Thematic networks building on Operational Group results

Horizon Europe thematic networks are multi-actor projects that collect knowledge that is ready for practice, translate it into easily understandable materials and make it widely available. Several thematic networks specifically build on results from Operational Groups, including **CLIMED-FRUIT**, **Oper8**, **FOREST4EU**, **NUTRI-KNOW** and **Soil-X-Change**.

Nutrient management is a major area of interest for EU farmers. Several Operational Group projects have developed ways to optimise agricultural nutrient use, in close collaboration with farmers. Horizon thematic network 'NUTRI-KNOW' is building on the results of 12 Operational Groups from Spain, Italy, Belgium and Ireland.

"All participating projects have produced valuable solutions that can benefit farmers and others in the nutrient value chain," says NUTRI-KNOW coordinator Victor Carbajal Perelló (BETA TC, Spain).

"We've made sure that at least one partner from each Operational Group is a partner in our consortium, to guarantee a strong connection with their expertise from practice."

VICTOR CARBAJAL PERELLÓ
NUTRI-KNOW coordinator (BETA TC, Spain)

"NUTRI-KNOW will share practice-oriented knowledge through an online 'Community of Practice' and a best practices database, and promote collaborative spaces that connect people and organisations. By improving access to information and facilitating strong knowledge flows, we hope to encourage the uptake of sustainable nutrient management practices at farm level across the EU, benefitting both farmers and the environment."

→ More info **on the NUTRI-KNOW website**.



→ **Keep an eye on future Horizon Europe calls** to hear about opportunities to engage with thematic networks broadening Operational Group outcomes.



The screenshot shows the EU CAP Network website interface. At the top, there is a navigation menu with options like 'EU CAP Network', 'News & Events', 'Networking', 'Projects and practice', 'Themes', and 'Resources'. A search bar is also present. The main content area features a large banner for 'Horizon Europe' with the tagline 'Creating knowledge and innovation for sustainable agriculture, forestry and rural communities'. Below this, there are three vertical image columns: one showing a stack of carrots, another showing hands holding soil, and a third showing a field of crops. To the right of these images, there is a text block describing Horizon Europe's contribution to sustainability and a list of 'On this page' items, including 'What is Horizon Europe?', 'How will Horizon Europe help farmers, foresters and rural communities?', 'How is Horizon Europe funding made available?', 'How to apply?', and 'Learn more about Horizon Europe'. A 'Learn more about' link is located at the bottom left of the page.

Stay updated on Horizon Europe opportunities

Browse the **Horizon Europe portal** on the EU CAP Network website to learn more about Horizon Europe multi-actor projects, including thematic and advisory networks, and the EU Soil Mission.

Operational Groups working on soil-related themes might be interested in joining consortia that are applying to calls under the EU Mission 'A soil deal for Europe', for instance to establish living labs.

The 'NATIOONS' project and its follow-up project 'SOILL-Startup' support applicants to such calls.

An online matchmaking platform lets them meet potential project partners or mentors that provide coaching at national level, and access useful webinars and publications to help them prepare proposals or join living lab partnerships.

→ Find out more on the websites of **NATIOONS** and **SOILL-Startup**.

Explore the EIP-AGRI project database on the EU CAP Network website



Find out what **innovative projects** across the EU are working on



Find **solutions** to your challenge



Find practical outcomes of projects through **practice abstracts**



Find new **partners** for future projects

The online database features **EIP-AGRI Operational Groups, research and innovation projects** including those under the Horizon programme, and other innovative initiatives.

DISCOVER THE PORTAL EIP-AGRI Operational Groups

- > How do Operational Groups create practical, innovative solutions for real needs from practice?
- > Learn about funding and collaboration opportunities.
- > How do innovation support services help find partners, prepare projects, communicate effectively and share results?
- > Benefits of knowledge exchange and collaboration across borders.
- > How does your country support Operational Groups?

→ **Learn more about EIP-AGRI Operational Groups**

DISCOVER THE PORTAL Horizon Europe

- > How can Horizon Europe help farmers, foresters and rural communities?
- > How can you apply to Horizon calls?
- > Learn more about Horizon multi-actor projects including thematic and advisory networks.
- > Get details on the Mission Soil's living labs and lighthouses.

→ **Learn more about Horizon Europe**

→ **Browse the EIP-AGRI project database**

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