

Green Architecture: designing green strategies

Thematic Group - 1st meeting

The first meeting of the Thematic Group (TG) enabled members to share which elements of the Common Agricultural Policy's (CAP) green architecture were used to address their environmental and climate needs, and how well they worked together. They also exchanged experiences on the key factors that influenced the design of the 'green' elements of CAP Strategic Plans (CSPs), and explored the various approaches adopted.


From Green Architecture to designing green strategies - an overview



In her [framing presentation](#) Harriet Bradley (EU CAP Network, non-permanent expert) provided an overview of the different interventions comprising the CAP's green architecture. She explained which interventions Member States (MS) used to address their respective environmental and climate needs. She highlighted a number of issues that had arisen during the first year of implementation, including the interaction and coherence between interventions, scheme flexibility, as well as governance.

Member States' approaches in designing green strategies

Representatives of four MAs gave insights on what approach the different MS took in designing their green strategies.

 **Miriam Augdoppler (Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Regions and Water Management, Austria)**, presented [the Austrian approach](#). Austria has a single agri-environmental programme (ÖPUL) covering multiple CAP interventions (eco-schemes, area-specific disadvantages [ASD] and agri-environment and climate commitments [AECC]). A modular approach has been adopted, with 25 measures that farmers can choose from, suited to different farm types. Top-up payments are available for additional measures that can be combined with the standard measures. This allows for a good distribution of environmental actions on farms, structured according to need. The advisory system is key to communicating interventions to farmers to ensure high uptake.

Event Information

Date: 11 April 2024

Location: Virtual meeting

Organisers: EU CAP Network

Participants: 55 participants from 22 Member States representing a range of organisations including Managing Authorities (MAs), Paying Agencies (PAs), [National Networks](#) (NNs), farmers and farming organisations, environmental NGOs, European and national/regional stakeholder organisations, farm advisors and the European Commission (DG AGRI, DG ENV).

Outcomes: Exchange of experiences on the design and implementation of 'green strategies' using the CAP's green architecture.


Web page: [1st meeting of the Thematic Group on Green Architecture: Designing Green Strategies | European CAP Network \(europa.eu\)](#)



Asa Wolgast Borberg (Ministry of Rural Affairs and Infrastructure, Sweden) explained the [Swedish green architecture](#). The focus has been to limit complexity and to avoid issues that arose in the previous CAP programming period. Sweden moved complex multi-annual AECC to eco-schemes, and reduced the number of requirements. The approach is for each intervention to have a different focus - they do not build on one another. The use of advice has a prominent role. Schemes under the CAP were slimmed down, with more national state-aided schemes introduced.



Ana Teresa Silva (Ministry of Agriculture and Food, Portugal), introduced the [Portuguese model](#). The Portuguese have maintained AECC in cases where a multi-annual commitment was considered necessary (e.g. protection of wildlife and habitat), with some adjustments to increase environmental ambition. They have focused eco-schemes on those practices that are attractive to farmers (integrated pest management, organic) to ensure they meet their annual budget under eco-schemes. Portugal's approach was to make eco-schemes and AECC complementary, as part of a wider package including non-productive investments, training, information and advice.



Boris Rabu and Benoît Pongérard (Ministry of Agriculture and Food Sovereignty, France) provided insights into the [French green strategy](#). France identified five key priorities (agroecology, resilience, biodiversity, water management, autonomy of production/sectors for grass-land farming and proteins and mitigation of GHG emissions) to be addressed by the CAP's green architecture. Farmers have a menu of measures to choose from: for AECC some are whole-farm and system focused, others are localised and part-farm. The eco-scheme follows also a "whole-farm" approach", but farmers have several options from which to choose. Significant efforts are also being made to support organic farming.

In the discussion session, TG members explored the pros and cons of multi-annual or annual commitments. They agreed that this was often context-specific, depending on various factors, including land ownership, planning horizons, and desired environmental outcome. TG members reinforced the importance of the supporting measures as an integral part of the green architecture, covering areas such as training for biodiversity, cooperation, advice, and communication.

Group Discussions and further reflections - Towards coherent strategies



Members were split into [three parallel groups](#), each exploring positive experiences and challenges of the design and interaction of different elements of the green architecture, and highlighting examples of good practice.

A panel of TG members, composed of **Raluca Ioana Barbu (Highclere Consulting, Romania)**, Tatiana Nemcova (Birdlife Europe, Slovakia), **Katherina Bissinger (Hessian Ministry of Agriculture and Environment, Germany)**, **John Murphy (CAP Network Ireland, Ireland)**, and **Sarah Westenburg (Boeren Natuur, the Netherlands)**, then reflected on the outcomes of the group discussions, including their own perspectives on main themes emerging and potential areas requiring further discussion by the TG.

Key points:

Farmers should be remunerated for providing ecosystem services, and their position in the value chain strengthened.

Sustainable production needs to be economically viable while shifting towards more environmental practices; these need to go hand in hand. Certification schemes were identified as additional promising mechanisms to encourage this outside the CAP.

There has been some movement towards developing results-based schemes as a means of encouraging farmers to focus more on achieving outcomes. This trend should continue, with the CAP looking beyond traditional controls to develop outcome-focused indicators and monitoring.

Moves towards a results-based approach will require a well-planned and transparent transition for businesses with input from advisory services and training providers.

A functioning advisory service and collaboration between MAs and NNs to develop information campaigns to increase awareness of different schemes are key; more focus on information and communication on the available options and support in facilitating farmers choice is also vital.


The current proposals for relaxing the Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions (GAEC) standards under conditionality may cause challenges for MAs, as the changes are happening mid-programming period. On the other hand, this could provide an opportunity to develop improved interventions under eco-schemes and AECC.

Going forward, there needs to be a more integrated approach to implementation as part of a wider simplification agenda, with MAs bending according to the needs of both farmers and the environment. Farmers should be free to focus on achieving the desired environmental outcomes, rather than needing to know the source of the funds.

Environmental issues are complex, and simple solutions are not always effective. Simplification can be best seen as finding better-clearer-and-simpler ways to support farmers in their choices (e.g. through improved IT systems), rather than simplifying what is asked of them. Changes made in the name of simplification should not have perverse environmental effects.

Simplification of controls and reporting processes would help both farmers and national authorities.

Approaches to implementing the green architecture should require communicating clear targets and experimenting with farmers taking control of implementation. Farmers should also be involved in monitoring, so that they know that the measures they take are effective in the long term.



Cooperation was cited as an opportunity for farmers to “own” the implementation and experiment with more sustainable practices. Ireland has made very good use of a flexible and simple approach to the cooperation intervention through **EIP-AGRI** (European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability). There is a lot of interest in Ireland about the role that EIP-AGRI operational groups (OG) play in improving the connections between stakeholders, including between the national level and local groups, whilst delivering environment and business benefits. EIP-AGRI can also be used to pilot innovative approaches that can then be mainstreamed, such as into agri-environmental schemes, as has happened in Ireland.

Next steps and concluding remarks



In the last session, members prioritised the topics for informal discussions over the coming months.

These will be on **simplification and enhanced environmental ambition** and on **innovative approaches and fostering cooperation**. The second and final meeting of the TG will take place on 04 June 2024.