

EU CAP Network Magazine

This edition of the EU CAP Network magazine focuses on the economic, social and environmental resilience of rural areas and the role networking plays to help build resilience.



Supporting the mental health of farmers and farming communities

08



How to assess social aspects of resilience?

10



EIP-AGRI Operational Group cross-visits contributing to rural resilience

22



Update on EU CAP Network Communication

24





Table of contents

04



Introduction 3

Towards more resilient rural areas 4

CAP support to rural resilience - in practice 4

Agricultural skills nurture rural resilience 5

Get involved in our thematic work! 5

06



Social perspective

Young entrepreneurs: engines of innovation in rural areas 6

Innovation and knowledge exchange to support rural change and stability 6

Young people building rural areas 7

Sustainability as a building block for vibrant and prosperous rural areas 7

Supporting the mental health of farmers and farming communities 8

Mental health and wellbeing foster rural resilience 9

Supporting the wellbeing of rural communities 9

10



How to assess social aspects of resilience? 10

LEADER plays a major role in supporting social inclusion 10

Environmental perspective

Supporting climate resilience in rural Europe 14

Promoting climate resilience in practice 15

16



What to expect when assessing the contribution of the CAP to environmental and climate resilience 16

The CAP Strategic Plans 17

Farm practices 19

Assessment of targets 19

20



Economic perspective

Smart circular farming to ensure farm resilience 20

Sustainable solutions in energy and nutrient management 20

Increasing energy autonomy 20

EIP-AGRI Operational Group cross-visits contributing to rural resilience 22

Knowledge exchange and technology transfer 22

Project portfolio analysis 22

24



Update on EU CAP Network Communication 24

EU CAP Network website 24

Newsletters 24

Publications 24

Social Media 24

Stakeholders' toolkit 24

ARIA 2023 25

EIP-AGRI Innovation Awards 2024 for Operational Groups 27

Introduction

The European Union's rural areas are a core part of the European way of life and active players in the EU green and digital transitions. They are home to 137 million people representing almost 30% of the EU population and over 80% of its territory. Diverse natural and climatic conditions of rural areas, their geographic features, historic and cultural heritage are valued for food production, management of natural resources, protection of natural landscapes, as well as recreation and tourism.

But rural areas are also facing numerous challenges: population decline and ageing, the erosion of rural infrastructure and service provision, including access to healthcare, social services or education.

The Commission's Communication on a long-term vision for the EU rural areas (LTVRA), adopted in 2021, aims to address these challenges by identifying means to improve quality of life in rural areas, achieve balanced territorial development and stimulate economic growth - it is a vision for stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas by 2040.

Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), in particular its rural development part, helps rural areas address challenges identified in the LTVRA. CAP Strategic Plans, designed by Member States, provide support shaped around national needs and capabilities, including generational renewal, depopulation, access to and improvement

of basic services and connectivity, opportunities for employment, growth, gender equality, social inclusion and local development.

This second edition of the EU CAP network magazine focuses on the resilience of rural areas in various aspects: economic, social and environmental. It shows you how networking, from European to local level, can support building resilience by providing space for sharing inspirational stories, good practices and experiences from the network's stakeholders on policy implementation, innovative solutions and evaluation approaches related to rural resilience.

It brings you insights from the EU CAP network's thematic work and activities that address farmers' mental health, support young entrepreneurs in rural areas or dive into the assessment of CAP contribution to environmental and climate resilience. Enjoy reading!



ANTONIA GÁMEZ MORENO

Head of Unit, Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development, European Commission

Resilience of the rural areas from various aspects



SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE



ENVIRONMENTAL PERSPECTIVE



ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE



Towards more resilient rural areas

'Resilience' is a precious quality that can help individuals and societies cope with successive crises. It is also a key asset for Europe's rural areas to overcome challenges and develop their full potential. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) offers a variety of tools to support the environmental, social and climate resilience of rural areas and communities - and we at the EU CAP Network are always eager to share inspiring examples with you!

In scientific terms, a 'resilient' substance is one that is able "to return to its usual shape after being bent, stretched or pressed"¹. Things get a little more complicated with humans: returning to our 'usual shape' (or behaviour) and finding our balance after a crisis can be hard if the external conditions have changed. Personal and community resilience therefore implies a capacity to change (oneself, one's behaviour and ways to live with others) to overcome difficulties and to adapt to a new situation, finding happiness, strength and meaning again.

Resilience is a key asset for EU rural areas and an explicit objective of the long-term vision², which aims to make the EU rural areas stronger, better connected, resilient and prosperous by 2040.

Economic, social and environmental resilience are the three mutually reinforcing components of rural resilience. According to research,

community wellbeing is the most important factor to promoting rural community resilience, together with ensuring shared responsibilities and co-ownership of resilience-building processes³. LEADER can be instrumental in strengthening rural resilience thanks to its bottom-up, collaborative and place-based approach⁴. However, a variety of other CAP interventions can support the social, environmental and economic resilience of rural areas.

CAP support to rural resilience - in practice

The **Agricultural and Rural Inspiration Awards (ARIA) 2023** highlighted some great examples of CAP support to rural resilience.

KoroKausi (Finland) helped agricultural enterprises recruit foreign seasonal workers and bring them into the country during the Covid19 crisis. The **Regional collaboration project + Business + Employment** (Spain) harmonised the access to information and training across 11 LEADER territories, facilitating employment. Importantly, both projects created web-based tools and real-life collaborations among companies, job seekers and service providers in their respective regions, leaving a long-term legacy.

→ **Read more on ARIA 2023 on p. 25-26.**

Other ARIA finalists, and a wealth of other CAP-funded projects included in our **good practice database**, provide further inspiration to make rural areas and communities more resilient. In addition, recent EU CAP Network thematic work has focused on policy priorities that can support rural resilience.

¹ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/resilience>

² https://rural-vision.europa.eu/index_en

³ <https://ruralresilience.eu/project-results/summary-report/>

⁴ LEADER's role in supporting the transition of rural areas to become stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous was acknowledged by European Commission's representatives at the workshop on LEADER and Multi-funded CLLD in October 2023, https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/publications/highlights-report-workshop-leader-and-multi-funded-clld_en

Agricultural skills nurture rural resilience

Resilience is also about anticipating and planning for challenges, whilst at the same time identifying and seizing new opportunities. Farmers, farm workers and other actors in the agri-food sector today need to effectively adapt to changing market and consumer demands, optimise production efficiency, mitigate environmental impact and improve working conditions. This requires acquiring and maintaining skills and knowledge in a variety of fields - from sustainability to precision farming, from work safety to marketing.

Our Thematic Group (TG) on **Nurturing Skills for a Thriving and Sustainable Agricultural Sector** took a close look at all this. TG members engaged in discussions on farm development, sustainable practices and digital literacy. They stressed the importance of a diverse skills set, encompassing 'soft' skills such as communication, leadership and conflict management, as well as the importance of intergenerational exchanges and the ever-changing nature of skills requirements.

The TG produced eight action-oriented recommendations for policy makers and a series of other practical and useful outputs (such as examples of approaches and good practices) that are **available online**.

Get involved in our thematic work!

- The EU CAP Network runs five Thematic Groups per year, where members work collaboratively to explore many interesting topics related to the implementation of the CAP across the EU. **You're welcome to join our next Thematic Groups!**
- Make sure you follow us on **social media** and via our monthly **newsletter** to be informed as soon as the expressions of interest to become a member are launched for new Thematic Groups.

"I believe that a systemic and precise promotion of knowledge is a key element enabling the agricultural sector to take up all the innovation and information that is available to improve production systems and embrace more environmentally and economically sustainable production mechanisms. By sharing experiences and best practices in skills development across Europe, we can find the right way to spread success stories more widely and help harmonise educational programs and opportunities for the whole agricultural sector."



DIANA LENZI

Entrepreneur in agriculture, farm and cellar manager, and professor for sustainable agribusiness, Italy - member of the Thematic Group on Nurturing Skills for a Thriving and Sustainable Agricultural Sector



Resources

Projects **Brochure** ARIA 2023 - learn more about the finalists of the Agricultural and Rural Inspiration Awards (ARIA) competition

- Thematic Group on **Nurturing Skills for a Thriving and Sustainable Agricultural Sector**
- Thematic Group on **CAP Strategic Plans: Monitoring Committees**
- Several **Policy Insights** articles look at rural resilience, including from the perspective of **reinforcing the long-term resilience of small farms**, **reinforcing rural tourism resilience**, and how **cooperation fosters food chain resilience**.



SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE

Young entrepreneurs: engines of innovation in rural areas

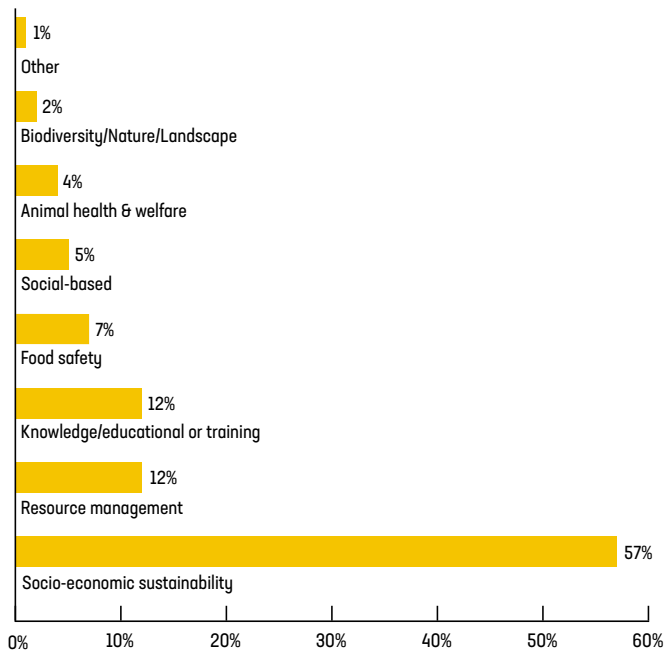
Rural areas are increasingly recognised for the value they offer in natural capital, environmental services, quality of life, culture and tradition, local know-how, and nature-based solutions. Despite these opportunities, it is still a challenge to convince young, skilled people to stay in rural areas, for them to develop rural entrepreneurship or business opportunities and make rural areas a better place to live and work.

Innovation and knowledge exchange to support rural change and stability

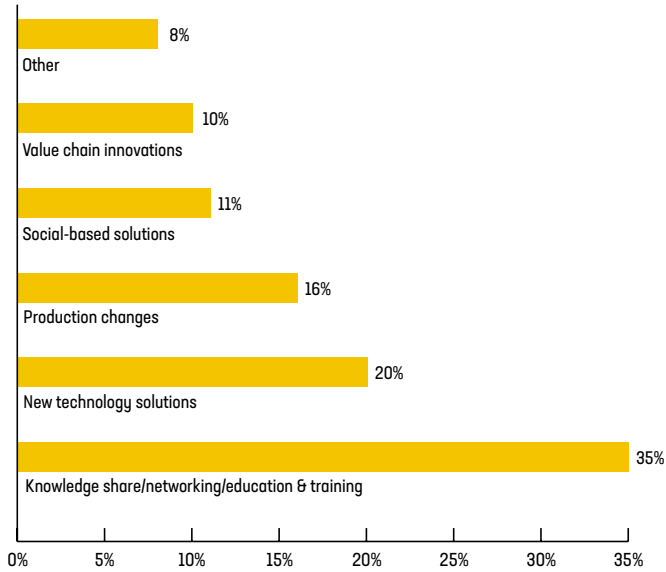
To better understand this out-migration trend, the EU CAP Network has made a data analysis of 166 European projects focusing on innovation, knowledge exchange and EIP-AGRI, all relating to young rural entrepreneurship. These are funded through Rural Development Programmes, national and regional funding, or the Horizon 2020, Erasmus, or Interreg programmes. This showed that innovation, and in particular social innovation, is widely accepted as a way to support socio-economic and environmental changes, help solve rural challenges, and build stability and prosperity in rural communities.

More than half of all analysed projects address socio-economic sustainability in rural areas. Knowledge sharing, networking and education are considered a good solution to tackle this challenge, for instance, by facilitating knowledge exchange among different people along the value chain and improving rural Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS). So-called 'capacity building' and strengthening skills can also help young people in starting up rural entrepreneurship to strengthen the socio-economic sustainability of their regions.

Challenges addressed by projects



Type of solution related to socio-economic sustainability



Young people building rural areas

The EU CAP Network Workshop ‘Young entrepreneurs - Engines of innovation in rural areas’ demonstrated that European rural areas can be attractive places for innovators and start-ups. Rural communities can be a source for developing sustainable socio-economic and territorial processes based on innovative and integrated land management, diversifying rural businesses and young people as a pool of talent and innovation.

Young people are generally more open to embracing innovation. They can play a key role in fostering a return to rural areas and can contribute to a more positive, inclusive and attractive image with plenty of opportunities for building resilient rural economies.

Sustainability as a building block for vibrant and prosperous rural areas

All participants in the ‘Young entrepreneurs’ workshop agreed that sustainability gives a sense of perspective and is very important to attract young entrepreneurs. Many participants highlighted how important it had been for them to develop their own business or project. In their view, sustainability includes good land management, as well as a wider community and economy, and an improved environment with socio-economic benefits and valuable ecosystem services.

Specific sustainability certification schemes can support young entrepreneurs in developing their businesses. Important tools that can prove sustainability in agriculture, forestry and rural areas include the Protected Designations of Origin (DOC) and organic certifications for agriculture (which are often national or local), forest management certifications such as the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), and tourism certifications for sustainable destinations such as the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC).



→ More information on EU CAP Network Workshop **‘Young entrepreneurs - engines of innovation in rural areas’**



Inspirational idea: helping young entrepreneurs to ask the right questions

A Swedish Operational Group is developing a tool that helps entrepreneurs plan long-term activities, such as future ownership changes or retirement. The tool also offers guidance on issues linked to the company’s long-term sustainability and the importance of personal values for entrepreneurship and leadership. **Read more.**

SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE

Supporting the mental health of farmers and farming communities

In recent years, there has been a growing focus on mental health challenges in European rural regions, with a particular emphasis on farmers, who play a pivotal role in bolstering the resilience of these regions. Our recent thematic work has looked at ways to support the mental health of farmers and farming communities.

Farmers' mental health can be impacted by several factors, including long working hours, geographical and social isolation, and financial uncertainty⁵. Access to mental health support may be difficult for logistical or practical reasons (lack of services, distance, lack of information...), while the strong emphasis on self-reliance and independence within rural communities may also deter farmers from seeking mental health care⁶.

Women in farming carry an additional burden, as they often feel the need to 'prove their worth' more than their male colleagues, face traditional gender norms (and the need to prove these norms are wrong), and overall feel they are not entitled to fail⁷.

Distressing observations from Member States, including on the alarming rates of accidents, fatalities and even suicides among farmers, underscore the urgent need for comprehensive support to the mental health and wellbeing of the farming community.



This needs to consider the unique challenges of rural life and the specific issues faced by those in the farming profession. EU level projects like **Safe Habitus** and **FarmWell** have been looking at how to improve the wellbeing of the EU's agricultural workforce, collecting examples and developing useful tools.

“Addressing farmers’ mental health is not just a call for empathy; it’s a crucial conversation that must engage farmers, researchers and policymakers alike. By collectively acknowledging the unique challenges farmers face, and by fostering an open dialogue, we can collaboratively explore concrete solutions, enhancing the social resilience of those who tirelessly tend to our fields.”



ALESSIA MUSUMARRA
Policy analyst, EU CAP Network

In June 2023, the European Commission published a communication on a comprehensive approach to mental health⁸, which acknowledges specific challenges faced by farmers and other people living in rural or remote areas. This important policy development underscores the EU's commitment to addressing this critical issue, emphasising the importance of providing accessible and effective mental health services to those residing in rural areas and at the same time ensuring the resilience of the rural communities⁹.

⁵ <https://oshwiki.osha.europa.eu/en/themes/psychosocial-issues-agriculture-sector>

⁶ For more information: Farmwell Mapping Report on Challenges https://farmwell-h2020.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/D-2.3_SYNTHESES1.pdf

⁷ EU CAP Network workshop 'Advancing gender equality in rural areas in the EU', report: <https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/publications/highlights-report-workshop-advancing-gender-equality-rural-areas-eu>

⁸ https://health.ec.europa.eu/non-communicable-diseases/mental-health_en

⁹ https://rural-vision.europa.eu/action-plan/resilient_en



Mental health and wellbeing foster rural resilience

CAP funding can be used to support the mental health of farmers and rural communities, and in turn improves their resilience. The recent Thematic Group (TG) on **Supporting the Mental Health of Farmers and Farming Communities** gathered some 40 stakeholders from across the EU to identify important, urgent and achievable goals to improve this crucial aspect of rural resilience. TG members were eager to share their experiences and knowledge and the wealth of information collected throughout the process (including good practices and recommendations) is available on the TG page.

"I believe mental wellbeing is the unsung hero of successful farming. While tractors plough fields, it's resilience that cultivates our spirit. In a profession where the fruits of our labour are often at the mercy of elements beyond our control, maintaining mental health isn't just important - it's essential. We farmers, often perceived as tough and unyielding as the oaks, face a barrage of uncertainties: fluctuating markets, unpredictable weather, and the isolating nature of our work. These challenges don't just test our soil; they test our souls. A healthy mind is like fertile soil - it nurtures everything that grows from it."



JAKE UJLAKY

Agrarian Chamber of Slovakia, and member of the Thematic Group on Supporting the Mental Health of Farmers and Farming Communities

Supporting the wellbeing of rural communities

Rural communities where nobody feels left behind or isolated and people are ready to join forces are more likely to be resilient. This is easier when people can get to know each other and can work together despite differences.

The **Agricultural and Rural Inspiration Awards (ARIA) 2023** highlighted some outstanding CAP-funded initiatives that are strengthening the social fabric of rural areas.

The **Food Act 13** initiative (Flanders, Belgium) works at the intersection of social inclusion, food waste reduction and poverty reduction. The project set up an innovative and efficient logistics system for local food distribution, while at the same time providing training and support to 'activate' long-term unemployed people and prepare them to re-enter the job market.

In the Netherlands, the **Urban Farm Doetinchem** turned an empty lot of land and a boarded-up barn into an urban agriculture hub which offers a meeting point for the whole community - including youth, the elderly and newcomers - as well as 'green' educational programmes for local schools.

Promoted by the Local Action Group (LAG) Bad Kissingen, Germany, the **People - Bees - Education** project regenerated a historic orchard while promoting beekeeping and the social inclusion of people with disabilities and vulnerable people. In a similar vein, Caiac SMILE promoted the development of independent life skills, counselling and support for vulnerable young people and their families through adaptive sports.



Resources

- Thematic Group on **Supporting the mental health of farmers and farming communities**
- Policy Insights - **Supporting the health and wellbeing of Europe's agricultural workforce**
- Policy Insights - **Enhancing gender equality in EU agri-food systems**
- An Agrifood Special CAPitals Brief looked at **mental health in farming**, with information from several Member States



SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE

How to assess social aspects of resilience?

LEADER plays a major role in supporting social inclusion

Many rural areas in the EU suffer from a range of problems such as a lack of attractive employment opportunities, skill shortages, under-investment in broadband, other digital infrastructure and essential services, which causes many young people to move elsewhere. Employment in agriculture is also declining, while unemployment in rural areas remains an issue, in particular among young people. The risk of social exclusion and poverty is a cause of concern in rural areas. The share of people in poverty in rural areas has been increasing since 2015. At the same time, **the poverty risk** is higher in rural areas (22.5% in 2021) compared to urban areas (21.9% in cities and 20.8 % in towns and suburbs)). The situation is worse in some countries in Southern and Eastern Europe.

Women in particular are affected by inequalities across all areas, including a risk of poverty and social exclusion. In 2021, only **over two-thirds of women living in rural areas** were employed. **Young**

people in rural areas of some Member States, particularly in the south, face high unemployment rates, while rates of those Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) in rural areas of Bulgaria, Romania, Greece and Italy are almost two or three times higher than the EU average in 2021.

Another group that suffers from the risk of poverty and social exclusion in EU rural areas is seasonal and migrant workers. They face poor working conditions in the agricultural sector and neglect of their basic health and safety while working. In addition to seasonal and migrant workers, EU and non-EU temporary or permanent, full- or part-time employed agricultural workers may also be subject to poor working conditions by those employers who do not respect social and labour law.

The evidence provided in this article comes from the stocktaking exercise that was carried out in the context of the **'Mapping and analysis of CAP Strategic Plans'** study by the European Commission. The mapping study was conducted between July 2022 and June 2023 and offered a first assessment of the strategic decisions made by Member States under the CAP. It mapped the choices made in the CAP Strategic Plans approved in December 2022 and analysed the joint efforts and potential impacts of Member States' choices in relation to the nine Specific Objectives and the Cross-Cutting Objective.



This context therefore demonstrates that the risk of poverty and social exclusion, unfavourable employment and unemployment situations are recurring features of many rural areas in the EU. They affect women, young people and other vulnerable groups disproportionately, such as migrants. This situation leads to depopulation and/or unbalanced demographic dynamics in many Member States, which requires effective solutions to attract and retain populations in rural areas.

A critical factor in addressing depopulation and shrinking rural areas is maintaining employment. One way to do this is through economic diversification to promote local resilience, focused on harnessing endogenous resources and, where possible, encouraging entrepreneurship within rural regions. More recently, the **long-term vision for rural areas**, set out in a European Commission communication, identifies areas of action towards stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas and communities.

The rural vision emphasises the need for rural areas to be socially resilient and inclusive, requiring tapping into the full breadth of talents and diversity in our societies. It complements the Commission's recommendations to Member States regarding their **CAP Strategic Plans** to strengthen the socio-economic fabric of rural areas by generating opportunities, including for the most vulnerable areas and societal groups.

The CAP in 2023-2027 aims to strengthen the socio-economic fabric in rural areas, addressing elements such as employment, growth and gender equality, including the participation of women in farming, social inclusion and local development. The new CAP is therefore expected to have an impact on the social resilience of rural areas, notably through interventions that contribute to social inclusion and gender equality.



One of the main policy instruments to this end is LEADER. LEADER strategies explicitly support the social inclusion of women, local minorities, migrants, refugees, the elderly and other people at risk of poverty and social exclusion, in many Member States. LEADER interventions in several CAP Strategic Plans aim to promote the participation of women in the Local Action Group's (LAG) decision-making body and/or LAG activities e.g. through the selection criteria for the Local Development Strategies (LDS).



In Estonia, the Netherlands and Romania for instance, LEADER interventions aim to promote the involvement of local minorities, migrants and refugees as well as people with disabilities and others at risk of poverty and social exclusion in the LAG's decision-making body and/or LAG activities.

In Estonia, Romania and Slovakia, the LEADER intervention will provide an opportunity to promote public-private cooperation, creating synergies between different actors by supporting different target groups and opportunities to present them (e.g. by creating community elders, regional working groups, etc.). Particularly in Romania and Slovakia, LEADER partnerships aim to be inclusive and represent the interests of the local groups, including the elderly, without discrimination.

Other types of cooperation interventions, outside LEADER, are also designed to contribute to social resilience in EU rural areas by targeting people at risk of poverty and social exclusion. Rural development cooperation for the development of social enterprises in Hungary is one example which identifies people at risk of poverty and social exclusion, with beneficiaries or target groups for cooperation being social farms and cooperatives. Support to cooperation in the field of health in Wallonia, Belgium, is another type of intervention that identifies beneficiaries as actors in social inclusion services and mental health services, etc. In Spain, one can also find cooperation for territorial structuring that aims to promote the implementation of projects contributing to social inclusion.

The use of eligibility criteria in many cases is also a means to promote social inclusion. For example, providing additional scoring to potential projects if they include or if they target vulnerable groups such as elderly people, women, young people, migrants or minorities.

CAP Strategic Plans also include cooperation interventions that target more specific groups, such as women, local minorities, migrants and refugees or elderly people, to promote their social inclusion. Some Member States, like Finland, will support cooperation activities for the development of the socioeconomic structure of rural areas that are expected to promote gender equality and improve the



situation for migrants or minorities and the elderly through targeted actions focusing on thematic areas or target groups. Support to young and new farmers in the Netherlands is expected to encourage the participation of female farmers by considering this aspect in the assessment, selection and ranking of project proposals.

When it comes to the promotion of gender equality as a vehicle for social resilience of rural areas, various policy instruments consider focused targeting on women. Support to young and new farmers frequently includes selection criteria that favour women. Cooperation interventions, like LEADER, require LAGs to include women or associations representing women, in their partnership composition or the LDS. One representative example comes from the Netherlands where local development strategies with more than 50% participation of women obtain higher quality scorings. In Slovakia too, at least three women must be represented in the highest body of the LAG, while in Germany, the participation of women is mandatory in all decision-making bodies.





Although it is primarily cooperation interventions that promote social resilience in rural areas through the promotion of gender equality, Austria, Denmark, Hungary and Spain also target gender equality through investment support. Hungary, Ireland and Poland have planned to prioritise women farmers in the eligibility criteria for off-farm productive investments, while Ireland and Italy provide higher support rates for investments undertaken by female beneficiaries.

To assess the extent to which Member States stay firm on their commitment to social resilience, future evaluations of the CAP can look at the achievement of targets of result indicators related to social inclusion. Targets are set for the number of persons supported by social inclusion projects as a result of infrastructure investments, village renewal strategies or cooperation projects. LEADER projects, expected to be selected by the end of 2024, will also contribute to the targets for social inclusion. As LEADER plays a key role in the social resilience of rural areas, an assessment of whether these targets are met will provide useful insights into the success of the policy in this field.

A recent **Good Practice Workshop** organised by the Evaluation Helpdesk focused on assessing the added value of LEADER. It drew lessons from EU and Member States' practical experiences on how to assess the different components of added value, notably social capital, governance and enhanced results due to LEADER implementation.

The implementation of LEADER brings added value in rural areas in terms of contributing to social capital, improving local and multi-level governance, and producing better results and impacts compared to other interventions that are implemented without the LEADER method. Social capital builds resilient rural communities, therefore the contribution of LEADER is very important there. This can be assessed by looking at aspects like the size and diversity of networks of LAG members and the type of organisations they represent, the social interactions within and outside the LAG territory, and the level of trust in the LAG. Improved governance strengthens the capacity of local actors and communities to access basic infrastructure,

manage resources and deliver services, thus contributing to resilient communities. This can be assessed by looking at the inclusiveness in decision-making bodies by type, age and gender, the administrative and technical competencies of LAGs, and the type, content and quality of interactions between LAGs and Managing Authorities.

Finally, the assessment of enhanced results due to the implementation of the LEADER method can look at the capacity of LEADER to engage new promoters, the capacity of LAGs to produce structural changes in their territory, the value of LEADER in enabling projects from different types of promoters to valorise unique territorial assets, the implementation of innovative projects in the local context, the promotion of cooperation, and the capacity of LEADER to produce economic, environment and social sustainability.



ENVIRONMENTAL PERSPECTIVE

Supporting climate resilience in rural Europe

Building resilience to climate change is about building the capacity of rural areas so that they can continue to thrive in the face of a changing climate and unpredictable disturbances, such as extreme weather events. Our Thematic Groups support the exchange of experiences and plans among rural stakeholders, advancing the understanding of the opportunities offered by the CAP.

Rural areas are multi-faceted and climate change affects them in many different ways, impacting both the production of food and feed, but also the built infrastructure and quality of life of those living in towns and villages. The way the land is managed can also help reduce the damaging effects of climate change. Nature-based solutions can help reduce flooding and the effects of heatwaves, for example by increasing the soil's ability to store water, or by increasing the density/presence of landscape features which can provide shelter for animals, help avoid soil erosion, provide refuge for nature and connect habitats for biodiversity, including pollinator species.

The CAP's green architecture is a set of rules and tools for improving the environmental and climate performance of farming, food production, land management and rural areas. It includes various interventions that Member States can use in different ways and different combinations to design their own green strategies, including

to improve resilience to the changing climate. Our Thematic Group (TG) on **Green Architecture: Designing Green Strategies** brings CAP stakeholders together to reflect on the state of play across the EU and examine how green strategies are supporting the realisation of environmental and climate targets.

Eco-schemes form a new part of the CAP's green architecture. Our TG on the **Design and Implementation of Eco-schemes in the new CAP Strategic Plans** gathered some 40 stakeholders to reflect on the range of eco-schemes being implemented across the EU and share experiences on levels of farmer engagement, what is working well and where improvements might be made in the coming years. The TG highlighted that, looking at the 158 eco-schemes currently in operation, there is a very strong focus on increasing the sustainable management of soils, as well as increasing the proportion of landscape features on farms, both of which will help improve the resilience of farms to the impacts of climate change. Lessons learned so far show that it is crucial to keep eco-schemes as simple as possible and ensure they are accessible to farmers of all farm types and sizes, making sure that payments are attractive, objectives are clear and the environmental ambition increases over time.

These TGs and other activities by the EU CAP Network, including previous thematic work on **landscape features** and **carbon farming**, offer precious opportunities to share experiences, insights and plans to use CAP tools flexibly and innovatively to adapt to a changing climate.



“The current CAP gives Member States the possibility to design their own green strategies according to their environmental and climate needs. This is an opportunity for Member States to enable a green and just transition. To be fit for the future and cope with the challenges of a changing climate, there is a balance to find between accessibility for farmers to CAP payments and increasing the environmental ambition over time. This calls for an open dialogue and exchange of best practices - our work in the Thematic Groups supports stakeholders to jointly develop recommendations on the future design of instruments in the Green Architecture.”



LISA HALLER, KALEY HART,
EIRINI LITINA

Policy analysts, EU CAP Network

Promoting climate resilience in practice

The **Agricultural and Rural Inspiration Awards (ARIA) 2023** highlighted some inspiring examples of CAP-funded projects that are supporting climate resilience.

The Portuguese project **On-farm growth and application of mycorrhizae** tested the effect on crops and soil quality of incorporating native laboratory-grown fungal roots into the soil. This innovative approach increased horticultural production and improved soil composition, increasing plants' resistance to stressors deriving from climate change, such as droughts and pests.



In Flanders, Belgium, the project **Treated wastewater for subirrigation** successfully tested an innovative approach to use wastewater to reduce or eliminate the need for surface crop irrigation. During the very dry summer of 2022, the area looked like a veritable 'green oasis', attracting the interest of nearby farmers and encouraging similar approaches.

Also in Belgium, the CAP empowered 22 farmers and 40 households to create a renewable energy community. The **Local energy for farmers and citizens** initiative resulted in a reduced use of fossil fuels (and money savings), but also in a more climate resilient community which coped well with the energy crises affecting Europe after the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The CAP provides many opportunities for Member States to support rural areas to improve their resilience to the effects of climate change, such as exploring different ways of promoting nature-based solutions, focussing on knowledge exchange as well as exploring the role that new technologies can play. Learning from the experiences of others and encouraging new ideas and innovative local solutions will be critical.



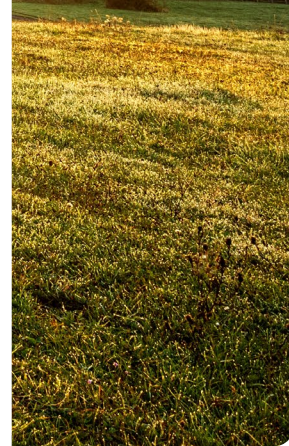
Resources

- Policy Insights - **CAP's Green Architecture components**
- Policy Insights - **Eco-schemes: evolving the CAP's green architecture**
- Thematic group on **Green Architecture - designing green strategies**
- Factsheet - **Designing successful schemes to promote the maintenance, restoration and creation of landscape features**
- Factsheet - **Upscaling carbon farming in the EU**
- EU CAP Network Projects Brochure **Carbon farming**



ENVIRONMENTAL PERSPECTIVE

What to expect when assessing the contribution of the CAP to environmental and climate resilience



A deep dive into Member States' choices in the CAP Strategic Plans

Agriculture and forestry production, as well as the people and ecosystems involved, are highly exposed to the changing climate. The changes and lack of dependable growing seasons, coupled with extreme weather events such as heatwaves, drought, storms and floods, are having serious implications for food, energy, and fibre production, as well as for biodiversity and the capacity for land to act as a carbon sink, all of which impacts our health and rural livelihoods. Member States are already noticing the impact of warmer temperatures on their agricultural productivity.

The number of natural catastrophes has increased worldwide. Therefore, it has become increasingly important to improve the resilience of agricultural ecosystems in the EU to reduce the potential risk and severity of climate change impacts.

The recently developed **long-term vision for rural areas**, set out in a European Commission communication, identifies areas of action towards stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas and communities. Concerning climate resilience, the rural vision stresses that rural areas should play a central role in the **EU Green Deal**. Rural areas should build on sustainable farming, forestry, agrifood economic activities and a diversified range of greener economic activities promoting carbon farming and local, community-based high-quality production.



The evidence provided in this article comes from the stocktaking exercise that was carried out in the context of the **'Mapping and analysis of CAP Strategic Plans'** study by the European Evaluation Helpdesk of the CAP. The mapping study was conducted between July 2022 and June 2023 and offered a first assessment of the strategic decisions made by Member States under the CAP. It mapped the choices made in the CAP Strategic Plans approved in December 2022 and analysed the joint efforts and potential impacts of Member States' choices in relation to the nine Specific Objectives and the Cross-Cutting Objective.

The CAP Strategic Plans

The **CAP in 2023-2027** aims to contribute to greener agriculture and forestry, focusing on interventions that are likely to have a broader interest for the rural community.

All CAP Strategic Plans identify needs for improved climate adaptation, such as improved management of extreme weather events and climate risks as well as improved water risk management, especially in Member States that have suffered from significant flooding (Germany, Hungary, Italy), fires and/or heatwaves (Spain, Malta, Portugal), drought (Spain, Italy, Portugal, France) and/or other intense weather events. The need to ensure climate resilience relates also to the improvement of varieties of both livestock and crops that are resistant against pests and diseases associated with warming climates and better adapted to climate change.

The new CAP, through support provided under Specific Objective 4 (Contribution to climate change mitigation and adaptation, as well as sustainable energy), Specific Objective 5 (Fostering sustainable development and efficient management of natural resources such as water, soil and air) and Specific Objective 6 (Contribution to the protection of biodiversity, enhance ecosystem services and preserve habitats and landscapes) of the CAP, is therefore expected to contribute to improved environmental and climate resilience in the farming sector.

One of the main policy instruments with a high potential for climate change mitigation and adaptation is cooperation-type interventions. These fall under different categories, notably, the **EIP Operational Groups**, LEADER strategies and other cooperation interventions. Cooperation projects in CAP Strategic Plans may have wide-ranging effects on climate resilience as they cover many topics, ranging from nature protection and biodiversity to renewable energy and risk prevention. For instance, EIP projects may support the transition of agriculture to green, digital and climate-neutral systems or promote



green public procurement. Cooperation has also been designed to support rural development cooperation for the development of a biomass-based economy and sustainable energy, such as renewable energy and related technologies, collaboration for forest fire prevention, and risk reduction and support for agricultural irrigation communities improving water efficiency.

CAP interventions supporting knowledge transfer, training and advisory services have also been designed to address environmental and climate-related topics such as climate change adaptation and mitigation, biodiversity, use of natural resources (water, soil, air) and circular economy. Finland, for instance, has programmed interventions to cover the production and distribution of renewable energy and biofuels, while Italy aims to provide information and support to AKIS actors on the use of natural resources, risk management and climate change, and problems related to the livestock, forestry and plant production sectors.



EU Green Deal objectives have a prominent role in the knowledge transfer interventions in Lithuania and Romania, including environmental practices covering biodiversity, soil and water, small waste technologies and innovative bio-based products among others.

Environmental and climate resilience in rural areas is the focus of many investment interventions in CAP Strategic Plans. Around half of these investments concern off-farm non-productive investments, such as renewable energy and energy efficiency, environmental infrastructure and basic services, as well as preserving and restoring the rural environment and natural and forest ecosystems and heritage land, water and irrigation, and preventive actions against adverse climate effects. For example, investments in environmental infrastructure and basic services cover aspects such as building common facilities and measures, including elements of green and blue infrastructure in Slovakia, non-productive investments in basic services in the natural environment in Spain, and infrastructure to promote the circular economy and other environmental infrastructure in the primary sector in Cyprus.



In addition to off-farm non-productive investments, many CAP Strategic Plans foresee infrastructure investments for environmental purposes. They include investments for supporting elements of green and blue infrastructure in Slovakia, climate and energy local infrastructure projects targeting bioeconomy, energy efficiency and production in Austria or land improvement environmental protection facilities targeting landscape and water in Estonia. Several Member States have also designed green investments and bio-economy infrastructure, focusing on water and irrigation.

The resilience of forests is the subject of many investment interventions covering a wide range of topics, including forest management, infrastructure and preventive actions in the sector regarding natural disasters, adverse climatic events or catastrophic events, as well as afforestation and restoration of forests, protection of forest areas, non-productive investments in forests for climate change adaptation and investments in agrosystems.

The success of investments in addressing environmental resilience depends on their internal design and targeting. Specifically, the involvement of micro- and small enterprises, individuals and also groups of holdings, including several rural entities as well as specific target groups, like women, ensure that the rural societal and economic fabric becomes a facilitator towards climate resilience.

The support to areas facing natural and other constraints (ANC) under the CAP also has a high potential to contribute to the Strategic Objectives addressing climate change and biodiversity in particular. The ANC support can contribute to limiting land abandonment, which positively affects rural development. It helps preserve farmland biodiversity, especially on mountain pastures and supports maintaining land for economic activity, contributing to rural resilience.



Other interventions in the design of CAP Strategic Plans provide more evidence on the CAP's potential to contribute to climate and environmental resilience. Agroforestry can support adaptation for soil and water retention and temperature regulation by providing shade and shelter. Sectoral interventions are supported in different ways, revealing the breadth of adaptation actions. For example, within the Irish CAP Strategic Plan, sectoral interventions can contribute to energy audits for farms, environmental management of green waste, and treatment and reuse of excess irrigation water. The Finnish CAP Strategic Plan lists consultation, training and meetings with advisers on climate adaptation, including carbon farming under their sectoral interventions. Croatia is supporting the conservation of endangered native breeds due to their significant importance for adapting to climate change and ensuring sustainable food production in the future.





Farm practices

CAP Strategic Plans will also contribute to increasing the resilience of rural areas to climate change and the environment, using a variety of farm practices. A wide array of farm practices is addressed under multiple agri-environmental and climate interventions, investments and eco-schemes. Farm practices include crop rotation and diversification, landscape, forestry, grassland and grazing, wildlife and agrobiodiversity, bioeconomy, energy efficiency and organic farming. Landscape farm practices play a key role in resilience to climate change adaptation. They concern the presence of landscape features such as hedgerows, individual or group of trees, trees in line, High-Nature Value systems and silvicultural systems, as well as the management of other unproductive areas and strips, agroforestry, conservation of traditional agricultural landscapes, and the management of wetland or peatland. In the context of eco-schemes and agri-environment and climate interventions, soil management practices, such as soil cover and the use of catch crops in crop rotations, can enhance soil quality and therefore resilience against climate change impacts. Grassland and grazing farm practices, such as conservation/maintenance of grassland and livestock density limitation (extensive grasslands) and conversion of arable land to grassland, supported by investments, eco-schemes and agri-environment and climate interventions, can also protect grasslands that are at risk of degradation due to unsustainable management practices and climate change.



Assessment of targets

To assess the extent to which Member States stay firm on their commitment to environmental and climate resilience, future evaluations of the CAP can look at the achievement of targets of relevant result indicators. Most CAP Strategic Plans have programmed eco-schemes and environment-climate interventions in relation to the target of the climate change adaptation result indicator. Some Member States, like France, the Netherlands and Finland, have set the highest targets for their climate change adaptation result indicator, whose achievement can be assessed in the context of future CAP evaluations. In addition, more than half of CAP Strategic Plans are aiming to support commitments to adaptation on at least a fifth of their utilised agricultural area.

Another relevant indicator is the carbon storage in soils and biomass, measured by the share of Utilised agricultural area under supported commitments to reduce emissions or to maintain or enhance carbon storage (including permanent grassland, permanent crops with permanent green cover, agricultural land in wetland and peatland). Luxembourg, Estonia and Finland stand out for targets as high as 92% in the case of Luxembourg. Similarly, improving and protecting soils measured by the share of Utilised agricultural area under supported commitments beneficial for soil management to improve soil quality and biota is another indicator that can give indications on climate resilience. Several types of interventions can contribute to it, including eco-schemes, agri-environment and climate and sectoral interventions. Luxembourg, Czech Republic, Finland and France are those with targets exceeding 70% for this indicator.

Assessments of whether the targets of result indicators are met will provide useful insights into the success of the policy in the field of climate resilience.

→ **Mapping and analysis of CAP Strategic Plans.**
Assessment of joint efforts for 2023-2027

ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE

Smart circular farming to ensure farm resilience

Farming and food systems have become increasingly dependent on external energy and fertiliser inputs. The climate crisis and market disruptions such as the Covid-19 pandemic have resulted in volatile prices for agricultural resources and products. This makes farming and rural areas more vulnerable, and it can threaten food security in the long term. Promising innovative solutions focus on using local resources more efficiently, stimulating the circular use of agricultural waste and by-products, and promoting practices from sustainable agriculture and organic farming.

Sustainable solutions in energy and nutrient management

A shift towards more sustainable and circular agriculture can help reduce the intense need for energy and fertiliser in agricultural production. Agroecological practices such as intercropping, green manure or organic fertiliser can lower the need for energy-intensive, industrial production of nitrogen.

The EU CAP Network has analysed 290 projects focusing on innovation, knowledge exchange and EIP-AGRI that have been set up across the EU. They are funded through Rural Development, Horizon, LIFE or Interreg programmes. This analysis gives information on the priorities of projects that deal with circular agriculture, focusing on energy and soil fertility. Sustainable resource management proves to be the biggest challenge for many projects.

Energy and nutrient management have become especially crucial in times of high input prices and resource depletion. Sustainable, innovative solutions can help address these challenges by optimising the local adaptation of processes related to energy and nutrient use, adding value to by-products, and increasing the overall efficiency and sustainability of the farming and food sector.

One of the most promising solutions includes optimising the production process to make it more efficient in terms of energy and resource use. New technologies and digital solutions can help farmers manage their land in a more efficient way, reduce nutrient losses, add value to agricultural waste and side streams, and optimise their energy production and consumption.



Increasing energy autonomy

One of the conclusions of the EU CAP Network Seminar ‘Smart circular farming to address high energy and fertiliser prices’ was that local and decentralised energy solutions may help producers become less dependent on external resources. By promoting renewable energy sources such as solar power, wind and geothermal energy, farmers and regions can become more autonomous in their energy use.

“Collaboration between local governments, businesses, universities, research institutes, NGOs and citizens is essential for the successful implementation of circular economy approaches. Important key players can help share the knowledge and technology that is needed to tackle energy and fertiliser challenges on a large scale.”



ZDENĚK LINHART
Czech Republic

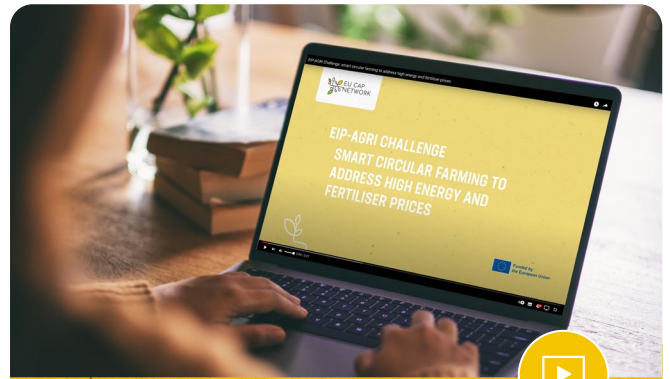


Farmers can learn more about using renewable resources and applying energy-efficient production systems and fertiliser alternatives by attending workshops and visiting demonstration farms and living labs. Public-private partnerships can help develop circular economy solutions. A regional or national task force can coordinate, facilitate and support the transition to a circular rural economy.

Smart circular farming solutions can contribute to the resilience of the entire region. For farmers, circular thinking can be boosted by engaging with their communities, finding new ways to collaborate, and working together to create more sustainable and resilient food systems.

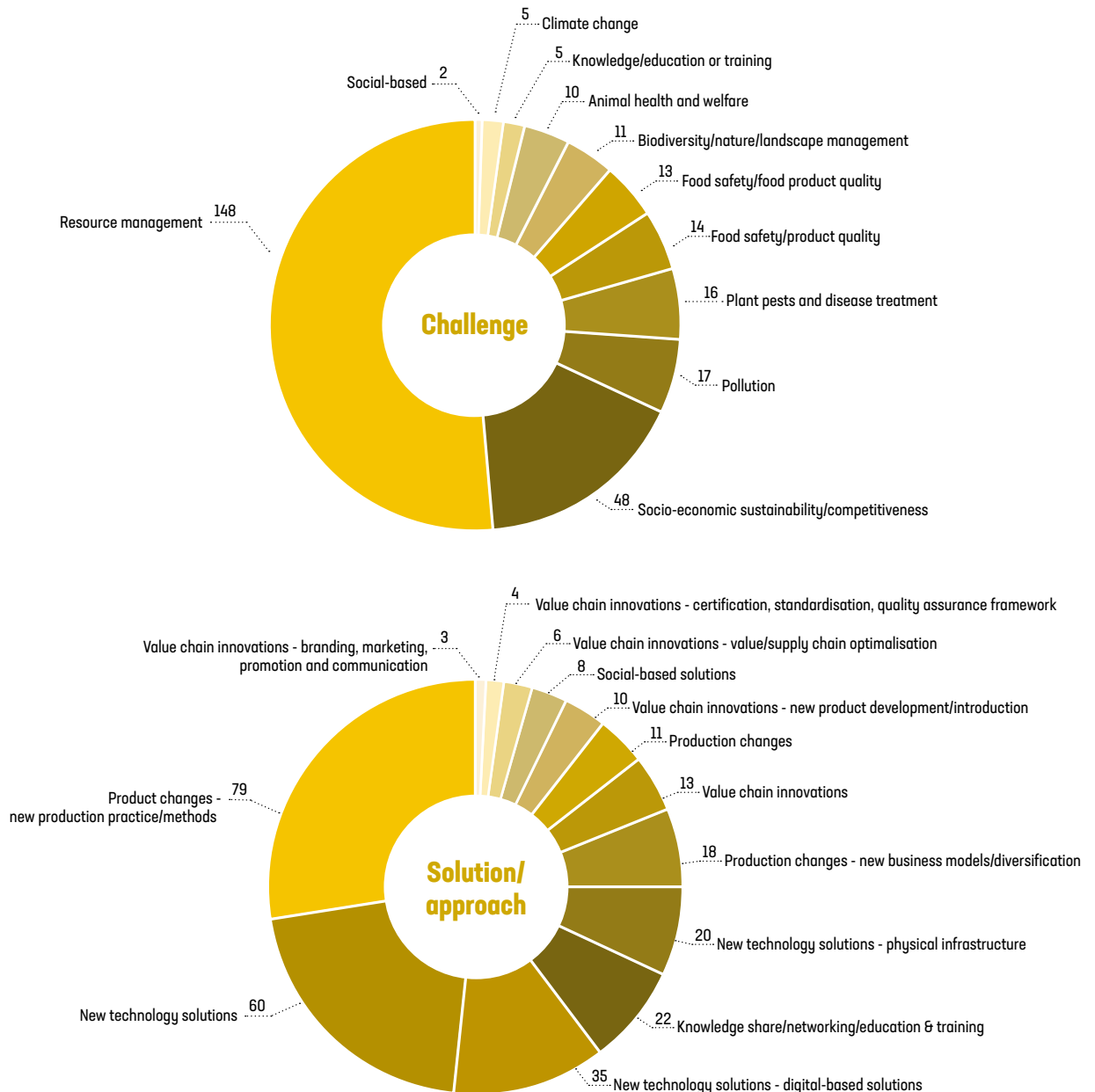


→ More information: eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/events/eu-cap-network-seminar-smart-circular-farming-address-high-energy-and-fertiliser-prices



Innovative inoculants reducing the use of chemical fertilisers (Portugal)

In the ECOSEED project, the company 'Fertiprado' develops seed mixtures with innovative inoculants to improve soil quality and reduce the use of chemical fertilisers. **Watch the video**



ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE

EIP-AGRI Operational Group cross-visits contributing to rural resilience

The European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability (EIP-AGRI) plays a pivotal role in finding, sharing and implementing innovative and sustainable practices for agriculture, forestry and rural areas. Exchanging knowledge and experiences is crucial in this process, as illustrated by the multiple cross-visits that were organised for Operational Groups (OG) working on supply and value chain optimisation. These visits resulted in a wide exchange of knowledge and technological advancements, contributing significantly to the sustainability and resilience of rural communities.

Knowledge exchange and technology transfer

Cross-visits offer a unique platform for farmers, researchers and other innovators in Operational Group projects to come together, and share expertise and good practices on, for instance, ways to optimise value chains, which was one of the topics of the cross-visits organised in June 2023. Exchanging knowledge can empower cross-visit participants with a broader perspective on sustainable practices in their field. Being introduced to a variety of approaches from different projects across the EU can encourage farmers and other OG partners to take up innovative solutions in their projects or draw inspiration from successful strategies that were tested or implemented elsewhere. This openness to innovation, flexibility and collaboration can enrich the collective knowledge of the agricultural community and contribute to a more resilient and diversified rural economy.

In the case of the cross-visits on supply and value chain optimisation, adopting innovative solutions can improve efficiency, reduce production costs and make value chains more competitive.



Project portfolio analysis

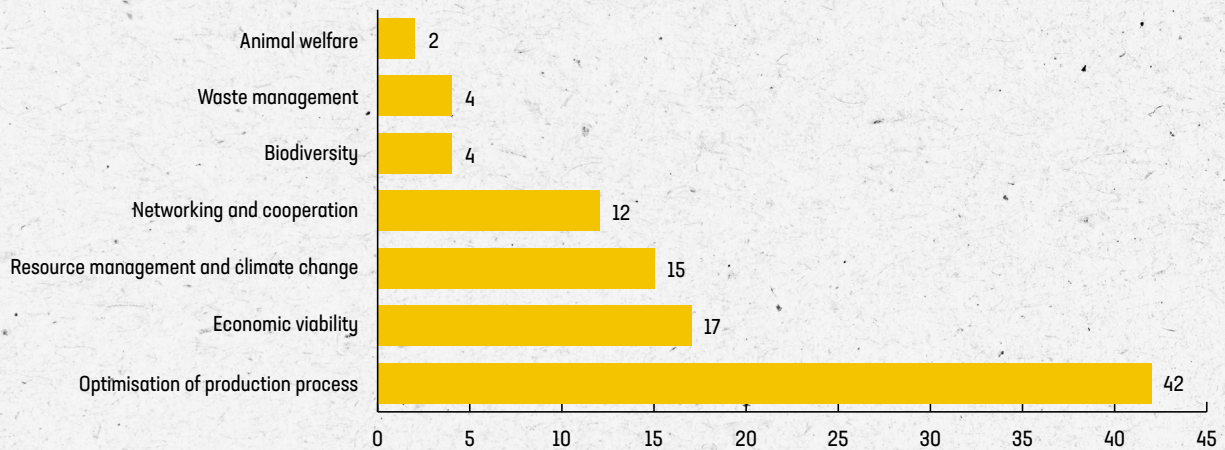
To prepare the cross-visits, the EU CAP Network has analysed 96 OGs funded through Rural Development Programmes that are tackling supply and value chain optimisation in organic farming. Optimising production processes form a major challenge for all projects. While some work on introducing and transferring innovations, most projects focus on testing cultivation practices or methods, and developing new products.

The analysis showed that optimising production processes rely heavily on the use of new technologies. They can support more efficient production and processing, lower the need for human labour, manage risk, or offer decision support to manage data and estimate the water and carbon footprint. Some projects use training and access to modern technology as a way to accurately track their business performance, allowing them to increase production on the farm.

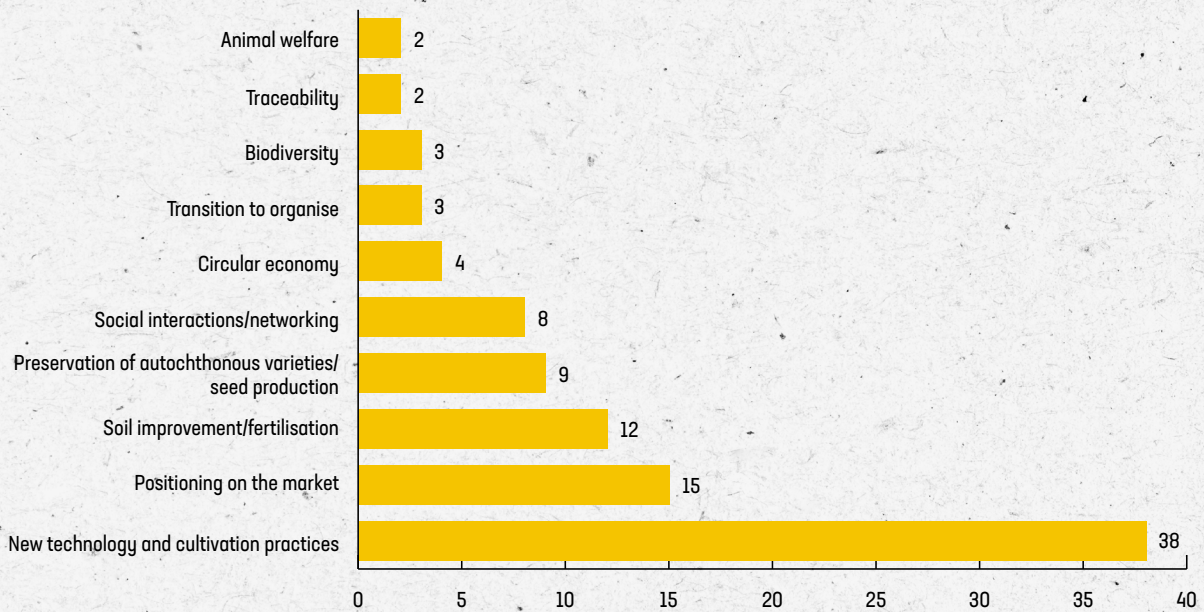
The analysed OG projects also test solutions for better market positioning. This includes increasing the visibility of local products through a quality mark, awareness-raising campaigns for markets or fairs, setting up different types of short food supply chains or production networks, product placement, identifying new marketing channels, improving commercial value or extending the product range, and so on. This allows farmers to give added value to their products and improve their income.

Many OGs are already looking for collaborations with other projects to improve their knowledge or confirm the reliability of the solutions they are testing.

Main challenges addressed by OG projects



Main solutions tested by OG projects



Multiple cross-visits in Tuscany, Italy

The multiple cross-visits between EIP-AGRI Operational Groups working on supply and value chain optimisation in organic farming took place on 28–29 June 2023 in Tuscany, Italy. Many participants found opportunities for future collaborations with other Operational Groups. For example, two projects explored a shared interest in ways to support farms in the digital transition by adopting the **SeedLinked** system.

More information: eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/events/eu-cap-network-cross-visit-circular-and-organic-soil-management





Update on EU CAP Network Communication

EU CAP Network website

Our **website** keeps growing to increasingly represent the vast diversity of our stakeholders and showcase their projects, work and initiatives – while also providing resources to support them. Accessibility is paramount in networking and exchanging knowledge, hence the content is available in the 24 EU official languages through machine translation. In the past months, new areas of the website were launched, such as the **Good Practice database**, the **EU level CAP evaluation framework**, the **EIP-AGRI projects database** and numerous informative portals on **LEADER**, **Operational Groups**, **Horizon** etc.

Newsletters

Whether you are interested in innovation, evaluation, or LEADER, or if you just want to be informed about the network's activities more broadly, we have a **newsletter** tailored to your taste. Our EU CAP Network newsletter and our Innovation and Knowledge Exchange|EIP-AGRI newsletter are mailed out monthly, whereas all LEADER-related updates are featured quarterly in our LEADER Newsletter. Those interested in CAP evaluation and monitoring will surely enjoy reading the quarterly issues of CAP Evaluation News. All our newsletters are available in English, French and German, so you can subscribe and read them in your language of choice.



Publications

The EU CAP Network also produces a series of insightful **publications** on a wide variety of topics. These include brochures, reports from events, Policy Insights, good practices, press articles, evaluation reports and many more interesting reads that are also available on our website.

Social Media

You can also follow our activities closely on the EU CAP Network's social media channels, where we share information and daily updates about current and upcoming events, publications and other initiatives. We invite you to follow the EU CAP Network on LinkedIn, X/Twitter and Facebook so you don't miss a thing.



Stakeholders' toolkit

As a stakeholder of the EU CAP Network, you are pivotal to the network's success. Sharing initiatives within your network can significantly enhance the reach and impact of the activities of the EU CAP Network.

The material in the **toolkit** can be freely used. It includes a range of resources and materials designed to enable you to best communicate about the activities and initiatives of the EU CAP Network, as well as instructions on how to spread the word about your own actions more easily. Your commitment as a multiplier is key to building a more informed and connected community across Europe. The EU CAP Network's support teams thank you in advance for your contribution.

ARIA 2023

In 2023, the **Agricultural and Rural Inspiration Awards (ARIA)** recognised projects funded by the CAP that are elevating agricultural expertise and revitalising rural communities.

Entries from National CAP Networks were gathered, and 92 entries from 20 Member States were submitted. Experts from the EU CAP Network narrowed down the selection to 24 projects. A 'Popular Vote' remained open throughout November, enabling the public to vote for their preferred project among the shortlisted ones. Through the Popular Vote platform, over 13 000 votes were cast.



Discover the competition winners



Local energy for farmers and citizens, Belgium

In the rural village of Hal, in Belgium, 22 farmers and 40 citizens seized the opportunities offered by the 'Clean energy for all Europeans Package', which fosters the production and sale of electricity between citizens and SMEs. Motivated by this opportunity, the village started a cooperative called Halnet c.v. with the aim of (co)investing in and generating income from local renewable energy projects and attaining the status of a renewable energy community.

An EIP-Operational Group facilitated this process, whereby farmers and citizens learned about the relevant legal, organisational and technical aspects of creating a rural renewable energy community; gained knowledge about how to use new digital technologies; and selected a suitable revenue model for their cooperative. Finally, an innovative energy management system was set up to monitor and control the supply and demand of the local energy market.



KoroKausi, Finland

The KoroKausi project was able to help agricultural enterprises recruit seasonal workers when the Covid-19-related public health restrictions prevented them from hiring the workers that they normally use on their farms. A real threat was posed by a wave of farm bankruptcies without sufficient seasonal labour, which would have jeopardised seed production into the future. The project used charter flights to arrange safe access to Finland for the required seasonal workers. Information resources were published online at www.toitasuomesta.fi, a portal set up by the project which helped agricultural enterprises recruit workers and jobseekers to find employment in rural areas, including after the project period. Thanks to the project, no farms went bankrupt due to labour shortages during the pandemic. In addition, the project highlighted the importance of rural livelihoods for the functioning of society and increased understanding of the importance of the vitality of rural areas and their development.



ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

The landscape farm, Portugal

The Landscape Farm project is about creating a new approach to farming by fundamentally changing the mindset of farmers, from only being producers of food to becoming landscape managers. Thus, food is just the tip of the iceberg in terms of preserving culture, protecting biodiversity, enhancing soil quality, managing water, restoring rural ecosystems, creating safe and beautiful places to live in and enhancing the nature of the landscape of each region. That mindset then needs to demonstrate a path towards integrating food production into social and environmental aspects in what can be termed 'landscape farming'. In short, there are as many ways of producing food and preserving local gastronomy as there are landscape units and these create jobs, networks and biodiversity, and help the country's agriculture adapt to warmer climates in the present and future.



SOCIO-ECONOMIC FABRIC OF RURAL AREAS

Regional cooperation project + Business + Employment, Spain

In this collaborative project, 11 LAGs developed a joint strategy to provide a more effective response to the needs of jobseekers and businesses in Castilla y León (Spain). The project integrated all sectors but given the geographical situation, the primary sector (agri-food) and the service sector were more dominant than others. The project designed a new mechanism to bring the job market closer to those looking for jobs aiming to retain people in the rural area and thereby reduce unemployment.

The aim was to harmonise access to information, guidance and training across the participating territories so that the take-up of existing employment and self-employment opportunities would improve. Social inclusion, equal opportunities and socio-economic sustainability were key principles of the project.

Thanks to the jobs portal that was created, the beneficiaries (companies, job seekers, and service providers) connect directly with each other and receive important information about opportunities and activities.

→ **Download the EU CAP Network Projects Brochure to discover all 24 finalists.**



POPULAR VOTE

Urban Farm Doetinchem, the Netherlands

The Stadsboerin project aimed to connect people from different backgrounds with food and nature in their city. An empty lot of three acres of land with a boarded-up barn was converted into a lively green meeting place and urban agriculture was created where people can participate daily in informal events, buy food and eat in the catering area. This creates community spirit and social inclusion. The target groups include the elderly, young people, residents, migrants and refugees who participate in the kitchen, garden and social activities. This enables people to find peace, space and understanding, and to engage in activities. Key activities include selling food in the on-farm store, organising packages of vegetable for families, city hospitality, catering and meals. In addition, a variety of workshops and classes are organised for city residents, and schools to share the experience of converting a barren meadow into an oasis of life from which to grow food.



2024 **#ARIAwards24** are now open for submissions!

EIP-AGRI Innovation Awards 2024 for Operational Groups

To commemorate the diverse range of pioneering projects initiated by Operational Groups (OGs) and their commendable accomplishments spanning the past eight years, the EU CAP Network is hosting the first ever EIP-AGRI Innovation Awards. The main goal of these awards is to give props to awesome EIP-AGRI OGs that have led the way in creative ideas, solutions, products and processes.



Sustainable management of natural resources in farming practices

EIP-AGRI OGs that demonstrate innovative practices in resource efficiency and management that support sustainable transitions in agricultural systems.



Business models in food supply chains

OGs that showcase innovative business models with a focus on short food supply chains, marketing and consumption initiatives that have the potential to improve farm incomes, promote sustainable farming systems and contribute to local economic development.



Animal welfare and husbandry

OGs that contribute to improving animal welfare and sustainability of animal farms through innovative practices related to cage-free practices, precision livestock farming, new commercial opportunities and so on.



Climate change mitigation and adaptation

OGs that strengthen the resilience of agriculture and rural areas through innovative initiatives and practices directly related to climate change mitigation and adaptation or related to efficient energy management.



Sustainable forest management

OGs that showcase innovative forest management approaches related to, for example: climate-smart forestry, pests and diseases management, nature restoration, forest ecosystem services, new technologies and circular bioeconomy.



Digitalisation

OGs that demonstrate how digitalisation has great potential to increase profitability, improve working conditions for farmers, foresters and others, as well as improve the environmental and climate impact of agriculture and forestry.



Public Favourite Award

The broader European public can cast their votes for their favourite OG out of the 30 nominees.

The winners will be announced during the awards ceremony held in Estoril, Portugal, as part of the EU CAP Network Conference 'EIP-AGRI Operational Groups: Innovation in Practice'.

Technical information

Managing editor: Antonia Gámez Moreno, Head of Unit - Rural Areas and Networks, AGRI-D1, Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development, European Commission

Contents and editing: Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development, AGRI-D1, CAP Implementation Contact Point, Support Facility for Innovation & Knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI, European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP, Communication & Events Support

Layout: Communication & Events Support

Photo credits: © Adobe Stock; EU CAP Network; Diana Lenzi; Caiac smile project; Jake Ujlaky; Stadsboerin Doetinchem; Equipo de Innovación Micorrizas; Boerenbond

All editions of the EU CAP Network magazine are available for [download online](#).

You can also order a paper copy via the EU Bookshop: bookshop.europa.eu

The contents of the EU CAP Network magazine do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the institutions of the European Union.

EU CAP Network magazine is published in English, German and French and is available in digital format [on the EU CAP Network website](#).

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

© European Union, 2024

Reuse is authorised provided the source is acknowledged.

The reuse policy of European Commission documents is regulated by Decision 2011/833/EU (OJ L 330, 14.12.2011, p. 39).

For any use or reproduction of photos or other material that is not under the EU copyright, permission must be sought directly from the copyright holders.

For additional information on the European Union: europa.eu

The texts in this publication are for information purposes only and are not legally binding.

Print

KF-BD-24-001-EN-C

PDF

ISSN 2811-8111

KF-BD-24-001-EN-N



Publications Office
of the European Union

Visit the EU CAP NETWORK Website

 eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu

Follow the EU CAP NETWORK on social media

 facebook.com/eucapnetwork

 twitter.com/eucapnetwork

 youtube.com/@eucapnetwork

 linkedin.com/company/eu-cap-network

