



# European CAP Network Subgroup on CAP Strategic Plans

3<sup>rd</sup> meeting - 17 April 2024

Brussels

## Welcome and introduction by the Chair (DG AGRI)

Chair Antonia Gamez Moreno (DG AGRI) welcomed members to the **3<sup>rd</sup> meeting of the Subgroup on CAP Strategic Plans (SoCSP)**. In her opening remarks, she presented the meeting objectives, namely: delving into the progress of CAP Strategic Plans and simplification efforts at both the European Commission and Member State levels, fostering an exchange of best practices among Member States to alleviate administrative burdens on farmers, discussing updates and insights from EU CAP Network activities, as well as reflecting on the first year of CAP Strategic Plan (CSP) implementation and exploring opportunities for enhancement.



The Chair highlighted the continuity of discussions from the **previous SoCSP meeting in November 2023**, focusing on identifying successes and challenges amidst the backdrop of ongoing farmers' protests and market crises. At the previous **SoCSP meeting**, concerns were raised regarding bureaucratic red tape at both EU and national levels, prompting proactive measures and concrete actions from the Commission. Therefore, this meeting's agenda included presentations on these initiatives, as well as the initial findings of the EU survey conducted by farmers on simplification. Members were invited to share positive initiatives undertaken in their respective Member States in fostering a collaborative approach to addressing challenges and optimising the CAP framework.

## CAP Strategic plans update by DG AGRI - Focus on simplification

Efforts to simplify the CAP were outlined in a **presentation by Petros Angelopoulos and Katarzyna Dujka from DG AGRI**, detailing a simplification package proposed by the Commission. This package involves amending key CAP acts, Single Payment Regulation (SPR) and the Horizontal Regulation (HZR), with a **legal proposal** adopted by the Commission on 15 March 2024. The focus is on amending conditionality rules, such as Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions (GAEC) and enhancing CSP procedures. Short-term measures aim to improve administrative processes within the CAP, including revising the Area Monitoring System methodology to reduce on-farm visits and clarifying the use of geo-tagged photos. Efforts also include supporting farmers in transitioning to greener practices and conducting research studies on simplification and CAP governance.

A survey targeting farmers, conducted from 7 March to 8 April 2024, received 26 886 responses. It aimed to understand the burden associated with CAP procedures and rules, identifying concerns and complexities across EU countries. Initial insights highlight underrepresentation of certain categories and countries, with further analysis planned, including open-ended questions and responses from various groups.

The survey profile indicates that 81% of respondents are farmers applying for CAP support. Most of the applications came from Spain, Germany, Portugal and France. The respondents are for the most part engaged in cereals and other field crops, with nearly half farming under 50 hectares and over half of them under 50 years of age.

Regarding CAP aid applications, around 80% of farmers seek support, primarily from farmers' associations and cooperatives. Over half spend more than five days annually on CAP applications. Farmers' were mostly concerned with the burden of recording data manually. They expressed less concern with the software used to handle the data and had less trouble with data that was automatically collected. The survey results indicate that half of the respondents use mobile devices for providing geo-tagged photos. The most common issues reported were difficulties in using the application and that it is too time consuming, as well as the delay in receiving feedback on photo accuracy.

Concerning reporting obligations and on-site checks, the survey highlights issues such as duplicate reporting and significant time spent on inspections. For instance, 70% of farmers indicated undergoing on-site checks in the last three years, with an average duration of more than one working day.

Full analysis will follow in the coming months, supplemented by interviews with consenting respondents, with results expected to be published by autumn 2024. Further studies on the delivery model will collect information for a report to be submitted to the European Parliament and Council by the end of 2025.

During the **Q&A session**, participants engaged in a discussion touching upon various aspects of the CAP and its implementation. Some raised concerns regarding the effectiveness of communication efforts related to the survey conducted in Member States. They emphasised the need to assess the impact of these communications and highlighted the potential for positive narratives about farmers' contributions. Others expressed frustrations over bureaucratic hurdles associated with the CAP, particularly regarding red tape, and questioned the timing of proposed simplification measures. They suggested considering these measures in the context of future CAP reforms. Participants also discussed the challenges posed by the complexity of administrative systems, such as IACS, and the need for a balanced approach in implementing technological solutions like smartphones for administrative tasks. Further questions were raised about potential changes to non-productive areas and the detailed requirements in application forms. Participants sought clarity on these issues, emphasising the need for simplicity and practicality in administrative processes.

Additionally, participants expressed satisfaction with the response rate from young farmers in the survey and highlighted the importance of farmer organisations in supporting businesses. They cautioned against oversimplifying responses and urged consideration of the diverse challenges faced by farmers.

The session concluded with discussions about the selection process for in-depth interviews and the importance of ensuring economic benefits from environmental actions. Participants emphasised the need for a balanced approach in eco-schemes and suggested exploring compensation mechanisms in return for environmental efforts.

In response, DG AGRI provided insights on its cooperation with Member States and the ongoing efforts to address challenges within the CAP framework. They acknowledged the concerns raised and highlighted the importance of in-depth analysis and collaboration in developing solutions. DG AGRI assured that changes are under consideration and emphasised the importance of further analysis and collaboration with Member States to address concerns effectively.

## Simplification at Member State level

Simplification is a process that must be undertaken at the national level as well as at the EU level, as emphasised in the previous session. Two subgroup members expressed their willingness to share best practices before the meeting, and their presentations were planned to encourage other members to share developments in their respective countries.



## Sharing best practices on MS current or future efforts aimed

**James Claffey (CAP Network Ireland)** shared insights into Ireland's initiatives, particularly highlighting the Basic Income Support System (BISS) clinics. These clinics are tailored to reach out to farmers, some of whom are otherwise difficult to reach, with personalised assistance on completing online applications. Over 2 000 farmers have been engaged through these clinics, with additional support provided through regional offices. These clinics not only provide practical assistance but also serve as a communication channel, reducing the demand for advisory services during busy periods and fostering positive interaction within the farming community. They also serve as a platform for mental health support, allowing farmers to engage in conversations and exchange experiences.

Another initiative discussed was the annual knowledge workshop, which is designed to provide guidance and additional information to advisory services, enabling them to better understand local needs and consult with their clients effectively.

Additionally, efforts are under way to enhance capacity building through webinars, particularly focusing on EIP-AGRI applications. These webinars aim to improve the quality of applications, reduce administrative burdens, and provide support and advice to applicants. Attendees will receive comprehensive packs including partner search forms, application resources and evaluator guidelines. The **Irish CAP Network** will also conduct capacity building workshops for successful applicants.

**Teemu Hauhia (CAP Network Finland)** shared insights into Finland's simplification efforts and the use of electronic applications (e-apps) to streamline processes for farmers and rural development projects. He highlighted Finland's move towards electronic applications as a significant step in simplifying procedures and providing farmers more flexibility. Teemu Hauhia emphasised the positive outcomes of abandoning the payment entitlements system, a move that allowed for greater flexibility and new opportunities for farmers. Additionally, he gave examples of successful projects aimed at fostering cooperation between stakeholders and enabling farm-based experiments with researchers and advisors.

Teemu Hauhia highlighted the importance of cooperation between administrative bodies and companies that develop applications for farm management, facilitating the integration of e-app systems with other government databases and streamlining data collection processes.



As part of their efforts, [CAP Network Finland](#) organises training sessions, workshops and self-evaluation days to reflect on programme implementation and prepare for future periods. These initiatives aim to support farmers and stakeholders while promoting efficiency and innovation in Finnish agriculture.

**After these two presentations, participants shared insights and experiences from their countries to streamline processes.** In Germany and Finland, efforts to simplify CAP processes are aligned, yet challenges persist, often leading to blame being placed on different levels of governance. It was also stressed that complexity and red tape can come from different levels of administration: EU, national and regional and the source always clear. Concerns were raised from the Hungarian representative regarding the practical limitations of technology for simplification, including issues with spatial resolution and burdensome on-the-spot checks. A COPA representative emphasised the need for practical and straightforward measures to support a greener CAP. The importance of sharing best practices among states and conducting self-assessments on simplification was emphasised by several members, while challenges in navigating discussions between government entities were highlighted in the Czech republic. A representative from France emphasised the complexity of simplification under subsidiarity and underscored the importance of taking responsibility for risks and learning from complexities as essential aspects of innovation.

The chair concluded the session by underscoring the importance of sharing problems and solutions, increasing the relevance of networking, advisory services, and learning from each other's initiatives.



## News from the EU CAP Network

### AWP update & ARIA

David Lamb (EU CAP Network) presented the main outcomes of the preparations for the [Annual Work Programme \(AWP\)](#). The proposals put forward by the Subgroup members during the second meeting, complemented by inputs from the [Subgroup on Innovation and Knowledge Exchange \(SoIKe\)](#) and the [Subgroup on Leader and Territorial Development \(SoLTD\)](#), lay the groundwork for an exchange with DG AGRI. The process is more agile and flexible than it appears

on paper, allowing for faster reactions to suggestions received from network members and DG AGRI. In the last [SoCSP](#), topics were selected, demonstrating the flexibility of the EU CAP Network to respond to stakeholders, notably the emphasis on green architecture, which led to the establishment of a thematic group. David announced the [Agricultural and Rural Inspiration Awards \(ARIA\) 2024](#), focusing on empowering young people. This theme aligns with the NNs' priorities for youth empowerment and engagement, and a new award category underscores the cross-cutting objective of gender equality, with the winning project in this area selected by a jury. The timeline spans from March to July for applications, August to October for selecting the finalists, and October to November for the public vote and selection of winning entries by the jury.

### Update on the outcomes of the previous Thematic Groups

Next, [Alistair Prior, Cristina Rascon and Alessia Musumarra, \(EU CAP Network\)](#) presented insights from the three completed [Thematic Groups](#) (TGs) for discussion within the Subgroup.

The [TG on CSP Monitoring Committees](#) brought together 36 members from 21 Member States, pooling their expertise to enhance the operation of monitoring committees. Drawing from previous experiences, the group explored ways to ensure that Monitoring Committees serve as effective partners in implementing the CAP Strategic Plans. Through exchanges of experiences and discussions, the group identified both successes and areas for improvement, culminating in recommendations to optimise the role of Monitoring Committees in guiding CSP implementation.

The [TG on Design and Implementation of Eco-schemes in the new CSPs](#) convened with 40 members from 22 Member States. Objectives for the TG included sharing experiences regarding eco-scheme design, exploring issues relating to implementation, and developing recommendations for improvements. Additionally, informal discussions led by members covered administrative matters, awareness-raising, eco-scheme interaction with other green architecture elements and enhanced targeting and regionalisation. Their discussions led to the drafting of a [factsheet containing information on eco-scheme design](#) and implementation, including recommendations for Managing Authorities and actions to be addressed at the EU level.

### Sharing insights from ongoing Thematic Groups & exchange with members

The [TG on Nurturing Skills for a Thriving and Sustainable Agricultural Sector](#) has been actively engaged in discussing the evolving skill landscape within agriculture, addressing priority skill needs and interventions for upskilling and reskilling. With input from 42 members representing 18 Member States, discussions have covered various aspects such as technological advancements, changing societal demands, and policy support from the CAP. Outcomes from this TG include [practical examples of skills development approaches](#) and [actionable recommendations for policymakers](#). These resources serve to enhance collaboration between public and private sectors, promote innovation, and bridge skills gaps within the agricultural workforce across the EU.







### The second group on reinforcing environmental care and climate action, contributing to Green Deal Targets:

The importance of achieving a better balance and recognising farmers' contributions to the Green Deal were emphasised. Successful measures such as eco-schemes and specific interventions such as organic farming and crop rotation were praised, along with Pillar 2 initiatives like the AECM measures, which were also recognised for their effectiveness. Suggestions for improvement included simplifying processes and the need to focus more on eco-schemes rather than on GAECs for farmers. Another suggestion was to make the ambitions of eco-schemes more realistic to increase uptake. Participants also highlighted the role of innovation and the need for enhanced green education for farmers. Additionally, there were proposals to enhance coupled payments for organic farming and explore result-based payment models in the future.

### The third group on improving life in rural areas, focusing on rural development, support for young and new farmers, rural business creation, and measures to enhance rural attractiveness and social inclusion:

Discussions revolved around the pivotal role of young farmers and measures like installation support, but attention was also given to older farmers, with strategies for facilitating farm transition through financial assistance and mentorship programmes. The success of LEADER and AKIS initiatives was highlighted, stressing the need for their wider promotion. Concerns arose regarding farmers' access to land across Member States. Looking ahead, simplification emerged as a recurring theme in rural development policies, advocating for easier access to funds and synergies among different programmes, aligning with the Long Term Vision for Rural Areas. Additionally, there were calls to enhance inclusivity for farmers and rural workers within a broader territorial approach.

### The fourth group on cross-cutting objective on knowledge and innovation:

The discussions centred on advisory services, AKIS, Network and EIP-AGRI Operational groups. Some networks are already focusing on capacity building for advisors and training opportunities provided by technical personnel. Online platforms were highlighted as valuable tools for farmers, managing authorities and AKIS. The importance of incorporating new tools and fostering coordination and cooperation among various entities and actors was emphasised. Cross-border collaboration, such as digital field visits, was also underscored as crucial for advisors. The role of networks in Operational groups was highlighted for their assistance in identifying cooperation needs. Suggestions included involving researchers and universities in advisory services, enhancing the understanding of AKIS, and providing training for advisors, farmers, and farm workers. Simplified cost options, databases and demonstrations for farmers were proposed to promote knowledge exchange and innovation.

### Wrap-up of the day

The Chair gave a summary of the day and emphasised the importance of these exchanges among members, particularly considering their role in the implementation of the CAP and the feedback that DG AGRI is seeking from those currently involved. The agenda for the day enabled participants to delve into several key areas. These included examining the simplification efforts undertaken by the European Commission, reviewing preliminary results from a simplification survey directed at farmers, discussing Member State initiatives aimed at streamlining CAP implementation for farmers and providing an overview of EU CAP Network activities. The day concluded with an interactive session focused entirely on gathering feedback and recommendations regarding the first year of CAP implementation. The next and fourth meeting of the SoCSP is foreseen in autumn 2024.

