



European CAP Network Steering Group

2nd meeting - 15 May 2024

Brussels

Welcome and introduction by the Chair (DG AGRI)

The chair (Antonia Gamez Moreno, DG AGRI) opened the meeting and welcomed participants representing 15 Member States in addition to DG AGRI staff and EU CAP Network support units. She recalled that the previous and inaugural Steering Group (SG) meeting in [October 2023](#) focused on the set-up of the EU CAP Network Governance and discussed with the members the role and remit of the group.

This second meeting was designed to be more operational, following up on the activities of the network and coordinating its thematic work. The meeting's objectives were to introduce and discuss the potential success factors of the Strategic Framework of the EU CAP Network, present the outcomes of the Assembly, Subgroups and expert group meetings and update members on the EU CAP Network activities as well as other EU initiatives relevant for the network. The Steering Group also discussed the outline of the EU CAP Network Annual Work Programme for 2024/2025.

The chair acknowledged the importance of support for EU farmers and highlighted the possibilities for networking to better respond to farmers' concerns. Options include reflecting and discussing the position of farmers in society and more specifically in the food value chain.



The chair recalled that the members of the EU CAP Network's governance bodies are expected to attend their respective meetings. Any absences should be communicated ahead of time to allow for replacements and changes of nominated representatives, should they not be able to ensure regular participation.

EU CAP Network Strategic Framework

A brainstorming session on the EU CAP Network Strategic Framework was then facilitated by **Hannes Wimmer** and **Costas Apostolopoulos** from the EU CAP Network's Evaluation Helpdesk.

The SG is tasked with assessing the effectiveness and efficiency of the activities of the EU CAP Network. This should be done in the accordance with a Strategic Framework provided by the Assembly and based on SG inputs. The Strategic Framework is a tool which provides a set of indicators used to assess the Network's performance against its objectives. In this session, SG members considered key enabling factors for the Strategic Framework.

It was noted that progress on the Strategic Framework has been developed through earlier inputs during a thematic cluster meeting of NNs in May 2024. Related experience from the Member States highlighted that Finland has updated its CAP evaluation systems to allow for comparisons with networking achievements from the previous CAP period. NNs expressed interest in sharing previous evaluations of rural networking and the [EU CAP Network publications database will host examples](#).

The concept of success factors was explained to SG members by the Helpdesk to determine what an achievement of networking objectives would look like. This gives SG members the context for assessing the work of the EU CAP Network through the Strategic Framework. The assessment should show achievements in relation to the CAP's three general objectives, the seven specific objectives for CAP networking and the nine networking tasks established by the GSP regulation. The Strategic Framework uses output and results to help guide the assessment of the performance of implementation of the networking actions.

SG members focused their discussions on each of the seven specific objectives for CAP networking to identify suggestions for factors of success, and their responses were summarised as a separate input.

The next steps of the Strategic Framework involve the formulation of points from this fruitful SG session into assessment criteria and other assessment tools for each objective. SG members will be invited to comment and SG support for the Strategic Framework will continue at the next SG meeting in October 2024.

The agenda, presentations and other relevant material (MIRO board notes of the interactive session) are available on the [event page](#).

Subgroup and Assembly reports

The chair introduced this information session on governance meetings and evaluation expert group feedback by mentioning the appreciation that had been received about these EU CAP Network events. Stakeholders have valued the difference between these events and other Commission groups where discussions are more formal and political. Inputs and views of the EU CAP Network members are key when discussing and identifying the priorities to focus on and the activities to carry out within the Network.

The update on EU CAP Network activities and other EU initiatives relevant to the network followed. Rapporteurs were SG members who are also Subgroup representatives.

The update on the [Subgroup on Innovation and Knowledge Exchange \(SolKE\)](#) was provided by **Mark Redman** (Euromontana), who reported on previous SolKE meetings, highlighting the constructive networking that this group facilitates. He welcomed the updates on EIP-AGRI and Horizon. Topics recently covered included practical and administrative aspects of the Operational Groups (OGs), such as new guidelines for data.

SolKE has also promoted the new CAP network facility for cross-visits specifically on OGs as well as discussing cross-border opportunities for OGs through transnational cooperation (TNC) under Article 127. SolKE here provides a forum for OGs to learn from LEADER and this has included gaining TNC knowledge from the Nordic Baltic region's experience of effective cooperation.

News from EU and Member States is another regular agenda item on SolKE meetings. This allows for a useful two-way dialogue between national and EU stakeholders. Other useful information generated by SolKE were the recently reviewed lessons learned as reported by OGs that had encountered difficulties during implementation. This approach is useful for the continuation and expansion of the networks.

New priorities for future networking by SolKE would be informing and planning next year's EU CAP Network Annual Work Programme (AWP). Reflection on this process points to the benefits of SolKE members receiving concise and adequate information in advance. The information needs to be collected and drafted in a consistent manner so that it is useful for decision-making and assessments; therefore verbatim reporting was not encouraged.



An update from the [Subgroup on CAP Strategic Plans \(SoCSP\)](#) by **Remco Schreuder** (Paying Agency, Netherlands) evaluated and promoted the informal and formal networking opportunities provided via SoCSP during its recent exchanges on salient topics. These included CSP simplification and green strategies for CSPs. Q&A sessions had proven valuable for the work of the SoCSP as this type of dialogue can provide insights that are not available elsewhere.

Discussions on simplification raised awareness about revised conditionality rules for Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions (GAEC), as well as other procedures with reference to the farmers' survey on CSP administration. The debate on issues regarding IACS and smart farm technology was productive, noting the participation of auditors. Generational renewal remains another keen topic of interest for SoCSP.

As reported for SolKE, Member States are using SoCSP as a dialogue forum between EU and national levels. Irish good practice approaches in providing information on CSPs using "clinics" was shared, and the Dutch Paying Agency is now looking at how this approach could be transferred to help strengthen implementation of their CSP. Finnish innovations in smart, simplified, flexible CSP administration that were spotlighted by SoCSP were also promoted to the SG as of interest for other countries.

Inputs from SoCSP members have also informed the work of the EU CAP Network and Member States on how green strategies for CSPs can coordinate the implementation of CAP's green architecture. In summing up this report on SoCSP, SG members learnt that it will be useful to track how much of the Subgroup's work leads to definitive changes in CSP implementation.

The update from the [Subgroup on LEADER and territorial development \(SoLTD\)](#) by **Hartmut Berndt** from the German LEADER Association informed on the March meeting of SoLTD and its focus on promoting LEADER under the slogan "Smarter, Younger, Simpler". LEADER's potential to help sustain and bolster democratic values across rural Europe was also underscored.

The SoLTD update firstly confirmed that most LAGs were now selected and then summarised practical conditions with high relevance for the LAGs, such as cooperation, the LEADER logo and quantitative indicators.

New guidelines are prepared by the Evaluation Helpdesk to demonstrate LEADER's added value. Challenges relate to the need for data collection which should be balanced in order to give a reliable picture of LEADER real value.

Audit and simplification issues have been under review by SoLTD and feedback on the website's LEADER sections suggested the benefits of appropriate storytelling imagery. This improvement would demonstrate how the SoLTD can directly support the LEADER audience by enhancing their dedicated communication services.

Systematic networking between LEADER staff in Managing Authorities and Paying Agencies was encouraged. The SoLTD feedback report for the SG highlighted the communication capacity of the EU CAP Network as having an important role here.



Stakeholder activities shared during the most recent SoLTD had showcased ELARD's LEADER Congress and examples from Denmark, Finland and Slovenia raised awareness about different simplification approaches for LAGs during the SoLTD meeting.

Younger members will show their ambition for national and EU level cooperation at the Young LEADER Forum taking place in June. Connections to the LTVRA and the Rural Pact were identified and the overall usefulness of SoLTD for LAGs was reiterated, including for planning LEADER's future.

The chair welcomed these contributions and stated that many important points had been recorded for the SG during this session. A response about the LEADER logo is expected soon.

An update on monitoring and evaluation (M&E) was then presented from the Expert Group on the implementation of the CAP Strategic Plan Regulation. Eric Markus (Managing Authority, Sweden) reported on the latest two Expert Group meetings. These shared M&E experiences from Member States on wide-ranging topics including climate action, CAP reform and farmers' investment logic.

The Expert Group also follows M&E developments shared by the European Commission and the Evaluation Helpdesk, among them databases and the [agri-food data portal](#). Environmental indicators and novelties for the current M&E framework are also on the Expert Group's agenda.

Reflections from the Expert Group for the SG suggested more synergy is possible from closer alignment between the Expert Group's activity and the Evaluation Helpdesk.

The [Catalogue of CAP interventions](#) was underlined as helpful for Member State benchmarking and the SG learnt that greater awareness about this Catalogue could be achieved through the EU CAP Network's outreach activities.

Adrienn Csikai (Managing Authority, Hungary) continued the Expert Group feedback and drew connections with the SG meeting's earlier discussion on the Strategic Framework. A success of the EU CAP Network would be to help Member States to better navigate the current Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (PMEF) complexities, particularly through peer-learning.

Adrienn explained that an informal exchange forum on evaluation (Eval PLATFORM) already exists and said that it would be good to have a similar networking platform on monitoring and implementation, as well as a database of expertise on monitoring to facilitate peer-exchanges. The SG was asked to reach out to experts with the national authorities. Such a platform would promote exchanges and informal learning through online and in-person activities.

The existing peer-platform, the Learning Network run by the Paying Agencies, was seen as a useful model. The question is whether this type of learning network could be expanded to include relevant experts from Managing Authorities. Unfortunately, it does not seem possible as it exceeds the Learning Network's capacity.

There is a recommendation for a new networking event bringing together Paying Agencies and Managing Authorities within the EU CAP Network to tackle problematic issues as a priority. Commonly recurring issues relate to annual reporting, preference procedures, interpretations concerning unit amount for non-IACS interventions, IT solutions, methodologies for result indicators and practical information from the Commission on benchmarks for unit amount calculations. In these areas this type of cooperation could be facilitated by the EU CAP Network. Workshops were suggested to clarify key common issues.

Needs for capacity-building include guidelines for a shared understanding of rules, by means of a manual that would bring together all the information on the monitoring rules of the programming period 2023-2027. SG members learnt that such a CAP monitoring manual could be prepared for clarification and simplification purposes and to establish common best practices based on existing Member State experiences.



It could either be done as a dedicated online information platform or by improving the current CIRCA BC space, where the manual and all relevant documents would be accessible, including questions and answers (Q&As) from Member States filtered by topics/date/MSS/etc. Such a platform could host content, allow for exchanges and enhance the visibility of searchable topics. An additional helpdesk for monitoring with a focus on opportunities for administrative simplification was suggested to complement the Evaluation Helpdesk.

Karl Bauer (COPA) presented a report for the SG on the EU CAP Network **Assembly**. This was based on the published report from the last Assembly and underlined the importance of the Assembly as the EU CAP Network's high level governance body. It was noted as providing comprehensive support for its members through professional dialogue and could act as a unique stakeholder gathering with demonstrable capacity to help stakeholders achieve their ambitions.

The Assembly includes dedicated discussion time which was reported to the SG as being valuable and welcome. This time for dialogue allowed for informal exchanges on ideas and experience between high-level stakeholders, including farming bodies, about initial CSP findings. The informal format allows for new exchanges and inspires open cooperation.

Update on EU CAP Network activities and other EU initiatives relevant for the network

Team leaders of the four support units of the EU CAP Network shared milestones of the current working programme. Colleagues from the Broadband Competence Office (BCO) Network and DG AGRI staff dealing with the Rural Pact Support Office informed the SG about new developments. SG members were able to gain insights into linkages between EU initiatives. This helped the SG to clarify cooperation opportunities for coordination, and efficiency through synergies and complementarities across different aspects of support to rural development

David Lamb (CAP Implementation Contact Point) informed SG members about two important milestones for the EU CAP Network: the forthcoming **Young LEADER Forum** (YLF) and the Common Network Statistics (CNS) that provide analysis for NN activity.

The YLF in June 2024 reflects the importance placed by EU CAP Network stakeholders on rural Europe's future generations. YLF is designed to collect youth perspectives on LEADER to understand how LEADER implementation could work for them, to exchange approaches to increasing the power of young people in LEADER policy making and implementation and to foster an international young LEADER community.

Over 200 participants have started to become involved, mostly young people with a cross-section of perspectives from rural Europe. Outcomes from the YLF organised in Finland will be available in various formats. An informal international young gamechangers' LEADER community will be considered to include participants from the Rural Pact Platform.

SG members then learned about the latest CNS findings. These collect and put together basic qualitative and quantitative information on NN activities across the EU to provide an overall picture of their achievements. Data at EU level is used for benchmarking and promoting EU-wide networking activities, raising awareness of NN achievements, identifying and compiling significant NN activities as examples from across Europe, while tracking progress within each individual NN.

CNS findings were presented such as the popularity of different types of events e.g. themes for events: farm income (680), rural areas (648), knowledge and innovation (458). NN themes disaggregate as those involving stakeholders (1 194), informing the public (1 000) and improving CAP implementation (711). A full report on the latest CNS is under way.

Pacôme Elouna Eyenga (Innovation & knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI Support Facility) summarised for SG members the EIP-AGRI Operational Groups' **Innovation in practice' conference**. This highlighted the successful implementation of the EIP-AGRI through OG projects and learned from their experience with a view to the implementation of projects under the CAP 2023-2027 period. Close to 550 participants took part from all Member States, including representatives of over 175 OG projects. The agenda featured field visits, plenary sessions, an innovation exhibition, the **EIP-AGRI Innovation Awards 2024 ceremony** and seven parallel workshops.

SG members then received reviews of three illustrative Focus Group (FG) projects - **FG on regenerative agriculture for soil health**, **FG on crops associations including milpa and protein crops** and **FG on competitiveness and resilience of mountain areas**.

Hannes Wimmer (European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP) provided the SG with information about the **Good Practice Workshop on Generational Renewal**. It aimed to help ally European and national measures into a strategic and holistic approach across CSPs for assessing generational renewal. Links between economic and social aspects, competitiveness and viability of farms are all part of evaluation under this topic.





SG members also learned about challenges in relation to data availability from previous programming periods, high costs of data collection and issues with the Farm Accountancy Data Network (FADN) and the Farm Sustainability Data Network (FSDN). Issues observed concerned the representativity, the small data samples and FSDN not being operational yet.

Recommended methodological approaches feature a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods. Adjustments for small countries or specific regions can ensure meaningful data collection and analysis. PME indicators, equality and disaggregated indicators were further points noted for SG reference.

Recent analytical work from the Evaluation Helpdesk includes i.a. a study on outcomes achieved by EIP-AGRI OG projects under the CAP. The study assesses outcomes so far achieved by EIP OG projects in the 2014-2022 programming period. It also identifies the main drivers and barriers to achieving EIP OG project outcomes, while comparing different approaches to EIP calls at Member State or regional level.

A full study report available from July 2024 on [EU CAP Network publications database](#) will provide new knowledge on i.a. the drivers and barriers for successful co-creation of innovative solutions and for scaling-up OG project outcomes, national and regional approaches to OG calls, achievement of outcomes by OG projects and outline of the communication and dissemination activities.

Tommaso Codazzi (Communication and Logistical Support team) gave the SG an update on new website features and publications of the EU CAP Network. Content is available in 24 languages and SG members were advised to navigate the site using colour codes for the three main areas of expertise: Green - CAP implementation, Yellow - Innovation, Orange - Evaluation.

A sample of new online material for and from the Network was presented under [49 searchable topics](#) with accompanying pages for news, events, publications, projects and more. Awareness was also raised about the website portals, databases, a [stakeholder toolkit](#) and SG members were encouraged to [share information on the EU CAP Network](#).

During the Q&A, the SG recognized the advantages of the support services that work well together in the EU CAP Network, such as they increasingly do on common themes like skills promotion.

The chair affirmed Unit D1 responsibilities in DG AGRI for rural networks and the future of EU rural areas.

Ashya Lane-Spollen outlined the function of the Broadband Competence Office (BCO) Network and the Broadband Support Facility. BCOs are national authorities advising policymakers, project promoters and citizens on broadband and the technological, legal and financial challenges of broadband projects. Information presented to the SG indicated possible BCO actions to accelerate rural connectivity including promoting rural-proofing of all digital policies, connectivity demand stimulation in rural areas, acceleration and facilitation of infrastructure sharing, as well as streamlining or facilitating construction permits.

National Broadband Plans should be aligned with rural priorities and SG members were notified that the BCO focus areas for 2024-25 are submarine and satellite connectivity, 5G, territorial connectivity, coverage with mobile technologies, connecting the last 1% under the EU's Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA) and developing applications for agriculture, environment, health, education, mobility and employment.

Alexia Rouby (DG AGRI) advised the SG about latest developments and achievements regarding synergies between the LTVRA, Rural Pact and the EU CAP Network. Relevant aspects of the report on the implementation of the LTVRA were reviewed to identify areas for the SG to see potential synergies. These include concentrating more on localised Rural Pact achievements using resources from the CAP including for soil, skills, bioeconomy, carbon farming, LEADER, innovation, evaluation and the EU CAP Network.

Opportunities for transversal synergies presented to the SG on options for NN involvement in the Rural Pact and national level achievements were reported. Finland's webpages on the LTVRA were noted for SG inspiration and other points for SG interest were listed. These include future actions and opportunities where the Rural Pact and EU CAP Network synergies could be possible - such as improving financing, quality of delivery and effectiveness, availability of policy-relevant rural statistics and data, among others.

The Q&A clarified that the Rural Pact Support Office will draft national country fiches and encouraged SG members to connect with the BCO to discuss rural digital solutions. Rural risks associated with cyber security were confirmed by DG AGRI to be outside of the BCO Network's remit.



Outline of the EU CAP Network Annual Work Programme 2024/2025

The proposed joint Annual Work Programme (AWP) for the EU CAP Network was presented to the SG members by **David Lamb, Pacôme Elouna Eyenga, Hannes Wimmer** and **Tommaso Codazzi**. The work programme showed which topics are proposed for 2024/2025 relating to the three General Objectives of the CAP as well as cross-cutting activities.

Following this a discussion took place with the SG members for the purpose of validating, framing and fine-tuning the topics. Members were asked to share any activities that have been completed by their own organisations that could feed into the AWP topics proposed. They were asked to share examples of good practices or methodologies that could enrich the work of the Network and to highlight key areas of the topics that should be considered, along with any particular stakeholder groups that should be targeted.

Members offered support for the topics included in the EU CAP Network's AWP. The topics reflect what is happening on the ground and are highly relevant. However, the concept of simplification should be explained in greater detail for better understanding of what it means.

Suggestions were made that, due to the same stakeholders being involved in some of the implementation and innovation focused events, they could be held on multiple or consecutive days, depending on the logistical practicalities. In general, coordination of events across the different support units of the Network was encouraged by Steering Group members. These comments were taken on board, with DG AGRI explaining that many different parameters need to be taken into account when programming events. The Network is working towards better coordination through the early development of the joint AWP and associated events calendar.

There were requests by members for the Thematic Group on CSP implementation to consider monitoring aspects and also to consider the inclusion of evaluation stakeholders in the FSDN workshop. Members wanted some analytical work on results-based interventions, as well as support for MSs to help build relationships and understanding between MAs and PAs to reduce bottlenecks as part of the work on simplification, as mentioned in LEADER.

There was a request for an evaluator workshop to support the Annual Performance Report (APR) process when milestones are not reached in the performance-based delivery model. With the new possibility for Operational Groups to work transnationally, support on opportunities and challenges could be addressed based on learnings from LEADER amongst others. It was suggested that any event related to the future CAP should be practically oriented and experience-based, hearing from stakeholders on what has worked, what hasn't and what else is required in the future CAP.

Members provided a number of activities and examples of work carried out in their Member States that could feed into the work of the EU CAP Network and committed to send written examples after the meeting.



Consideration could be given to stronger links with LTVRA and Rural Pact as a way for the EU CAP Network to contribute to outlining concrete objectives for the EU.

Many examples of good practice were generously shared by SG members, including innovation-related initiatives from Austria contributing to alternative strategies for sustainable livestock systems and robotics and artificial intelligence in farming and forestry. Eurromontana offered good practice examples from internal analysis of the CAP along with more mountain-related examples later in the year. Relating to the work on collective approaches to biodiversity, Ireland highlighted their ongoing 10 to 15-year longitudinal study, which includes ecologists and economists, to evaluate the impacts of CAP interventions on biodiversity. Italy highlighted a number of completed Operational Groups which may have useful outcomes to feed into the work on alternative strategies for more sustainable livestock practices and new plant protein sources. The French network offered to share the work their LEADER programme is doing related to ecological and energy transition. Their LAG network could share work relating to generation renewal and simplification to feed into the work on the perception of farmers in their role in society. ELARD are holding a cooperation event in early October and can share a paper they are developing on the ecosystem of stakeholders involved in LEADER in the autumn. An event in Italy 2024 will be related to demonstration farms.

Next steps

The chair thanked SG members for the useful contributions as set out at the meeting and informed on upcoming EU CAP Network meetings including the Assembly on 5 December.

