

Fifth Meeting of the Subgroup on Innovation and Knowledge Exchange (SolKE)

5 March 2024

All presentations and media from the 5th SolKE meeting can be found on the meeting's [EU CAP Network webpage](#).

Welcome and introduction

Hugo Almeida, Unit D1 “Rural areas and networks”, DG AGRI, welcomed SolKE members and [provided the latest updates](#) in the agricultural European Innovation Partnership (EIP-AGRI) world. Since the previous meeting, the number of EIP-AGRI Operational Group projects (OGs) reported through SFC has increased by 202, reaching 3,461 projects.

Subsequently, it was announced that the [online EIP-AGRI projects database](#) was launched on the EU CAP Network website in December 2023. This database features EIP-AGRI OGs and other innovative projects, including Horizon multi-actor projects. The database allows project filtering and features practice abstracts.

The members were also informed that the study on outcomes achieved by EIP-AGRI OGs is still ongoing and is now in the stage of processing and analysing the collected data. The primary results will be presented at the EU CAP Network Conference “EIP-AGRI Operational Groups: Innovation in practice” in May 2024.

At the end of his presentation Hugo highlighted the main outcomes of two recent networking activities devoted to innovation and knowledge exchange that is: the [first EU CAP Network workshop “National Networking for Innovation”](#) that took place in Tallinn, Estonia in November 2023 and the [EU CAP Network Seminar “Skills and lifelong learning for agricultural advisory and training service providers”](#) organised in February 2024 in Vienna, Austria. All the results of these events together with presentations and other relevant materials can be found on their websites.

Orsolya Frizon Somogyi, Unit F2 “Research and Innovation”, DG AGRI, [provided the latest developments](#) in the Horizon Europe Programme, explaining that the strategic planning of the 2025-2027 period of Horizon Europe Cluster 6 is being prepared and that the first Work Programme for 2025 is under preparation. The Work Programme 2024's calls were closed on 28 February.

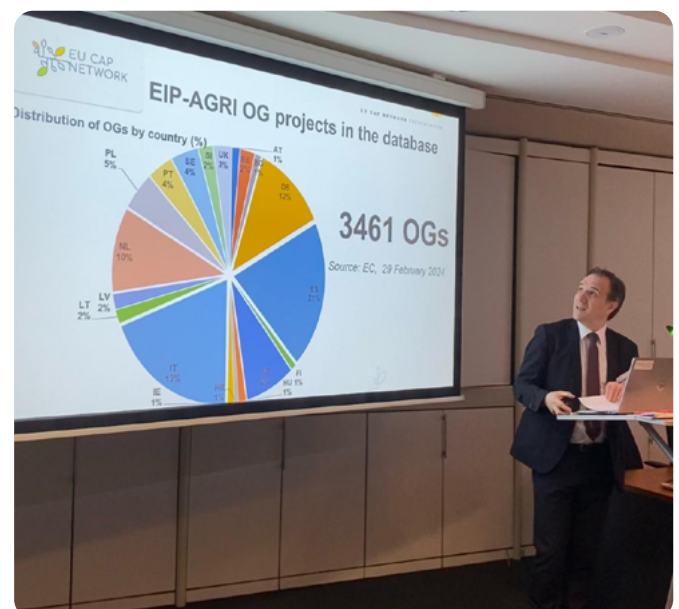
Four new thematic networks have been launched recently, she said: the [WelFarmers](#) EU Farmers' Pig Welfare Innovation Network; [SPARC](#) Sustainable Parasite Control in Grazing Ruminants; [TransformDairyNet](#) Working together to upscale Cow-Calf-Contact

dairy production and beyond; and the [“RENOVATE” project](#) that will develop an attractive knowledge sharing platform that provides farmers and agro-foresters with unique access to both new and existing training tools and renovated educational programmes. Two new Horizon thematic networks particularly relevant for EIP-AGRI OGs have also started: [BBIONETS](#) and [SOIL-X-CHANGE](#).

Three new advisory networks have also been initiated: the [OrganicAdviceNetwork](#), the [AdvisoryNetPEST](#) EU ADVISORY NETWORKs, and the [STRATUS AdvISor network for OptimAI fertIlisers Use](#).

In addition, two new thematic networks and three new advisory networks are in the pipeline.

Orsolya also said that on 8 February, the [EU-FarmBook](#) had its pre-launch event. This Horizon Europe project aims to build an online platform, gathering and sharing agriculture and forestry knowledge. In addition, two co-funded Horizon research partnerships have been launched recently: “Agroecology living labs and research infrastructures” and “Animals and health”. These partnerships are key to facilitate collaboration between Member States, the European Commission and research institutes. They will be co-funded with the Member States. The first call for applications will open later in 2024.



The Horizon Soil Mission remains an important tool under Horizon Europe to set up networks of living labs and lighthouses, with the goal to experiment and demonstrate innovation on site. The 2024 call for proposals will open soon. The EU Mission information days will take place on 25 and 26 April 2024.

In addition, the first Soil Mission week took place in November 2023 in Madrid, Spain. With almost 300 in-person participants, more than 600 online and around 1.6 million people reached on social media, it was a great occasion to gather the soil community together and to discuss soil health issues.

Finally, Orsolya invited SolKE members to support the Soil Manifesto, that helps raise awareness and action for soil health.



Session I: News from Member States

In this session, SolKE members updated each other on the latest news and developments from their countries.

In Greece, the number of OG projects reached 316 in 2023 (all ongoing). These projects mainly cover topics linked with animal and plant production, livestock and waste management, and fertilisation. An online map-database of Greek OGs was created to communicate project results. Greece is also working on a new national framework for the next call for EIP-AGRI OG projects to be launched under its CAP Strategic Plan (SP).

Finland, Estonia and Latvia are progressing under the “Network to Innovate” – a Nordic-Baltic partnership. The three countries opened parallel calls for OG projects at the beginning of 2024. They hosted online brokerage events for applicants interested in transnational cooperation, where project ideas were exchanged. In Finland, the call closed in late January, with another call planned for Autumn 2024. National Networks and Managing Authorities from Finland, Estonia, Latvia, as well as the Polish National Network and the Lithuanian Managing Authority, will meet in April to discuss approaches to align upcoming calls.

Sweden is working on better dissemination of their OGs' results. Notably, four Swedish projects co-hosted a stand at the Agritechnica fair in Hanover, Germany in November 2023. As this was very successful, Sweden is considering increasing the participation of their OGs at another fair. Additionally, Sweden is carrying out a study to learn from past OGs' experiences.

Italy has reached 761 OGs, however several regions have not yet submitted their projects to the database. In May this year, a meeting for new OG projects will take place in Sicily. In addition, progress is being made with the establishment of an Agricultural Knowledge and Information System (AKIS) coordination body at national level.

In the Netherlands, there are 14 calls for OG projects every year, two at national and 12 at the regional level (in the Dutch provinces). There is also a call for EIP-AGRI field labs, where OGs can be supported to kick-start their projects. The plans for these field labs are currently being developed and are likely to be funded on a permanent basis.

Managing Authorities from Wallonia (Belgium) and Luxembourg are collaborating to select four OG projects with Walloon and Luxembourgish stakeholders. The call for OG projects closed in early March 2024, and assessment will now follow.

In Flanders (Belgium), a separate budget was allocated this year for EIP-AGRI OGs working on innovative cooperation forms in the value chain. More than 80 applications were received, and 22 OGs will be funded.

Estonia is preparing to launch a new measure called the “innovation voucher”. It also plans to focus its EIP on Artificial Intelligence.

In Spain, the first call for selecting EIP-AGRI OG projects under the CAP SP received 150 proposals, from which 85 could be funded. Spain has set up their AKIS coordination body, which will be shared between the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Science, the autonomous regions and research entities. Additionally, digital innovation hubs are being created, as well as training programmes to mentor startups in the agri-food sector.

Germany has over 400 OG projects, however since the COVID-19 pandemic, it has become increasingly difficult to motivate them to participate in events. Therefore, this year, Germany will focus on new event types such as start-up exhibitions and field day exhibitions. In 2026, Germany hopes to set up a field day exhibition focusing specifically on EIP-AGRI OG projects. Additionally, a first transnational OG project has been launched between Germany and Italy, focusing on AI and viticulture.



In Austria, 13 new EIP-AGRI OG projects have been selected.

Hugo Almeida wrapped up the session by highlighting the importance of regularly updating the SFC database with OG projects by Member States, so that information on these projects could reach a wider audience across the EU. In addition, he encouraged those implementing CAP SPs to start the OGs' interventions early enough to ensure that all objectives and indicators can be met.



Session II: SolKE members - learning from failed initiatives in implementing the EIP-AGRI

In this session, SolKE members, in small discussion groups, shared failed or less successful experiences in implementing EIP-AGRI in their Member States, discussing learning points that could be drawn for the future.

Session III: Future networking activities on innovation and knowledge exchange - introduction

Magdalena Mach, Unit D1 "Rural areas and networks", DG AGRI, presented the booklet with ideas for future networking activities for the EIP-AGRI Support Facility. These topics were collected from SolKE and EU CAP Network assembly members, the EIP-AGRI SF team as well as from DG AGRI policy units.

Following this introduction, SolKE members were invited to prioritise topics for discussion by voting for those that they found the most relevant for the next Annual Work Programme.

Session III: Future networking activities on innovation and knowledge exchange - breakout discussions

The prioritised topics were further discussed in four breakout groups. Discussions were based on the question "What could be the scope of the networking activity under this topic?", also collecting inputs regarding the possible objectives and type of activity.

Summary of discussions of topics under CAP General Objective 1: Fostering a smart and resilient agricultural sector and food security

Two topics were discussed under this cluster. Firstly, with regard to the "Innovation in logistics and the position of farmers in short supply chains", SolKE members highlighted the importance of sustainability in logistics and the need to safeguard the competitiveness of farmers in the supply chain. The goal of such an event would be to share good practices of sustainable supply chains.

Secondly, with regard to "Balancing economic and environmental sustainability", SolKE members concluded that there needs to be more dialogue around what sustainability is from both these angles. They suggested that a workshop would seem to be the best way to get more in-depth discussions around this topic.

Summary of discussions of topics under CAP General Objective 2: Bolstering environmental care and climate action and contributing to the achievement of EU environmental and climate objectives

Three topics were debated under this cluster. The topic "High Nature Value farm land" could be approached from the perspective of economic viability of such farms. Incorporation of diversification and agrotourism could be an option to discuss. A Focus Group would be the best format to understand what the principles behind successful case studies are.

SolKE members also discussed the topic entitled: "Better understanding of environmental benefits and relevant indicators - by farmers". An important question here is what and how can this data be collected and used. Participants said better communication with both farmers and advisors is needed. A Seminar is proposed for this topic.

SolKE members discussed the need to have a systemic approach to the "Circular bioeconomy" topic. For example, this third topic could be focused on extracting nutrients and giving them a second life. A focus group could be a possible networking activity, discussing how the recovery of important feedback loops can turn a linear value chain into a circular value chain.



Summary of discussions of topics under CAP General Objectives 3: Strengthening the socio-economic fabric of rural areas

Three topics were discussed in detail under this cluster.

In the first: “How can innovation improve attractiveness of agriculture and boost generational renewal”, participants agreed to concentrate discussions on the younger generation, which are central to this topic. The particular focus was exploring how to create a socially enabling environment for innovation, addressing the need for economic viability in the agriculture sector to attract young people and to ensure generational renewal. SolKE members concluded that this topic needs to be more concrete before it can become a networking activity.

“Agri-tourism” can be a possible tool for risk management and diversification of income for farmers. SolKE members discussed how this topic extends to the broader rural fabric (including young farmers, existing agri-businesses and other sectors). Beyond added value, agri-tourism could help improve environmental sensitivity. An innovative approach to tackle the topic, however, was not defined.

Thirdly, “Strengthening connection from farmers to consumers and farm producers” is a topic linked with agri-tourism. SolKE members considered the innovative aspects of this topic. The potential lies in exploring the hybridisation of social and technological innovation, and in exploring the transferability and replicability of models for connecting producers and consumers. A seminar or workshop could be a suitable networking activity.

Summary of discussions of topics under the CAP cross-cutting objective

Four topics were discussed under this cluster. With regard to “Cooperation and knowledge exchange between Operational Groups (including cross-visits)”, the suggestion was to organise short online brokerage activities and to precede cross-visits with online meeting(s) to encourage such interactions between OGs. A networking event to learn about experiences, instruments and tools for cross-visits was also proposed.

An event on “Robotics and Artificial intelligence (AI) in farming and forestry” could support more efficient farming. The objective of a networking activity under this topic could be to connect OGs working on this theme to share results and to attract particularly young farmers to work in future projects.

SolKE members also discussed “Demonstration farms – spreading innovation” and concluded that to learn from demonstration farms, they should be planned in detail to understand what they are and what they do. The aim of a networking event would be to learn from demo farms, to make them visible and to connect them to OG projects and their results.

With regard to “EIP: How to ensure that the needs of the project come from the producers”, SolKE members reflected how this topic could be tackled more broadly. Additionally, the topic could be reformulated to focus on ideas for ensuring that both the current and future needs of farmers are met, and to refer to the involvement of farmers at every step of the interactive innovation process. A seminar on this topic could explore tools and good practices to promote the bottom-up, co-creative approach.

Evaluation, next steps and closing

Magdalena Mach, Unit D1 “Rural areas and networks”, DG AGRI closed the meeting by thanking the SolKE members for their contribution and said that the next SolKE meeting would take place on 6 June 2024 in Brussels, Belgium.

