



National Networking for Innovation

1st Workshop



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1. Introduction

National CAP Networks are key players in Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS), where AKIS is defined as ‘the combined organisation and knowledge flows between persons, organisations and institutions who use and produce knowledge for agriculture and interrelated fields’ (CAP Strategic Plans Regulation, Article 3 (Definitions)). National CAP Networks have the same objectives and tasks related to the AKIS strategy as the EU CAP Network, as defined in the CAP Regulation under Article 126. While National Networks have accumulated experience with the agricultural European Innovation Partnership (EIP-AGRI) during the previous programming period, the concept of the AKIS is relatively new within the context of the CAP. Moreover, it encompasses a broader application and scope in the new programme period.

The role of CAP Networks to improve the AKIS at national levels needs further support, as highlighted in the Network Mapping Surveys Summary Report (2023). At the first National CAP Networks meeting in Croatia (22-23 March 2023), attendees emphasised the need for capacity building and support within National CAP Networks. They highlighted the importance of peer-to-peer learning and of identifying best practices to better understand and navigate the AKIS.



CAP Networks must explore and understand their comprehensive roles and functions within the AKIS. This includes identifying strategies to effectively support and enhance the performance of AKIS in Member States. This understanding will enable CAP Networks to perform more effectively and meet their objectives within the AKIS in Member States, which, consistent with Article 114, will ensure the modernisation of agriculture, rural areas and the CAP.

In this context, the European Commission's EC - DG AGRI and the EIP-AGRI Support Facility organised an **initial workshop on national networking**. The aim was to discuss and exchange ideas with the National CAP Networks regarding their **roles in the AKIS** as well as their related tasks and objectives. This initial workshop focused on specific tasks and objectives as specified in Article 126:

- › Fostering innovation in agriculture and rural development, supporting peer-to-peer learning and promoting the inclusion and interaction of all stakeholders in the knowledge exchange and knowledge-building process (Art. 126, (3)(e))
- › Collecting information and facilitating the dissemination and networking of funded structures and projects, such as local action groups referred to in Article 33 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060, EIP Operational Groups (OGs) referred to in Article 127(3) of this Regulation and equivalent structures and projects (Art. 126, (4) (d))
- › Supporting cooperation projects between EIP Operational Groups referred to in Article 127(3) of this Regulation, local action groups referred to in Article 33 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 or similar local development structures, including transnational cooperation (Art. 126, (4)(e))

Related topics addressed by the workshop included networking approaches and tools to support a well-functioning AKIS, exchanging information on ongoing and planned networking activities to identify synergies and complementarities and determining the needs for support from the EIP-AGRI Support Facility at EU level.

2. Purpose and format of the workshop

With a specific focus on identifying best practices to empower National CAP Networks in fulfilling tasks under specific sections of Articles 114 and 126, the workshop aimed to achieve the following objectives:

- › Share various networking approaches and tools aimed at supporting the effective functioning of the AKIS.
- › Engage discussions and idea exchanges with National CAP Networks regarding their roles within the Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS) as outlined in Article. 126(3)(e) and 126(4)(d)(e), along with associated tasks and objectives.
- › Foster increased collaboration between National CAP Networks and the European CAP Network within the context of networking for innovation and knowledge exchange.

- › Facilitate idea exchanges on ongoing and planned networking activities to identify synergies and complementarities, including opportunities for cross-border and transnational cooperation.

The workshop was primarily aimed at engaging actors directly involved in fulfilling the objectives of National CAP Networks. It brought together a total of 85 participants, including representatives from Network Support Units (NSU) for the National CAP Networks; national and regional Managing Authorities; AKIS Coordination Bodies in EU Member States; and National Contact Points for Horizon AKIS-related multi-actor projects. Additionally, coordinators of Horizon thematic and advisory networks seeking connections with EIP-AGRI Operational Groups were also actively involved.



The chosen format of the workshop prioritised providing participants with opportunities to exchange knowledge and good practices, ensuring the harvesting and sharing of the significant experience that National Networks have gained with EIP-AGRI throughout the previous programming period. The workshop's format included presentations for scene-setting and inspiration, with a significant proportion of the agenda dedicated to interactive sessions involving all participants. The workshop also featured one-to-one question & answer clinics for participants to engage directly with presenters; and a session showcasing diverse posters and initiatives relevant to the workshop's objectives. In addition, an Active Listening Template was provided to participants so they could record their key learnings, action points and questions in preparation for the one-to-one question and answer clinics.

Over two days, the workshop featured three main themed blocks, each comprising presentations and an interactive session. The first thematic block focused on how National CAP Networks can support a **well-functioning AKIS** and enhanced networking within AKISs. There is a need to demystify, clarify and share good practices to the full range of AKIS activities that CAP National Networks can actively engage in and support. Four inspiring examples of achievements in this area were provided from Austria, Finland, Ireland, and Belgium. Following these examples, participants recapped on AKIS structures, actors, and the connections and knowledge flows between them. Participants then identified the vital features of a well-functioning AKIS; and practical actions that National CAP Networks can take to achieve these features in National AKISs.

The second thematic block focused on **how National CAP Networks can achieve specific key tasks and objectives emphasised in the workshop**: fostering innovation and knowledge exchange; identifying and targeting all relevant stakeholders; better connecting with researchers and advisors; supporting peer-to-peer learning; supporting knowledge-exchange and knowledge-building processes; collecting information and facilitating dissemination and networking of funded structures and projects. Inspiring examples were provided from Sweden, Slovenia, and the Horizon Europe project *EU-FarmBook* regarding the achievement of these tasks/objectives.

In six breakout groups, each assigned a specific task or objective, participants were helped to interpret and contextualise the tasks; and then to identify practical actions to achieve them. To conclude the interactive session, participants took part in an "ideas marketplace"; exchanging their ideas for taking specific actions they believe are highly effective in meeting the key objectives of the National CAP Networks.

Day 2, and the third thematic block of the event, focused entirely on stimulating further collaboration between National CAP Networks and the European CAP Network; and on identifying synergies and complementarities, through **cross-border and transnational cooperation**. An inspiring example from the Nordic-Baltic Network to Innovate was presented, followed by an interactive session where participants brainstormed about why and how cooperation between National CAP Networks can occur across borders. The focus then turned to cooperation between National CAP Networks and the EU CAP Network, emphasising the role of Managing Authorities and the support they offer.

The second part of the session centred on transnational cooperation for AKIS. This theme was introduced in the context of the Horizon Europe programme by a presentation from DG AGRI, accompanied by an array of posters featuring international projects. Participants engaged in interactive sessions to identify various motivating factors for National CAP Networks to support transnational cooperation and explored practical ways to facilitate such cooperation. The specific roles and support provided by National Contact Points in mobilising transnational cooperation were pointed out. Finally, synergies and complementarities across the range of cross-border and transnational cooperation efforts were identified.



3. Setting the scene

The European CAP Strategic Plan regulation provides a framework for interpreting National CAP Networks' roles in AKISs. A scene-setting presentation from DG AGRI at the workshop provided an overview of this framework, highlighting how cross-cutting CAP support can systematically share knowledge and innovation in agriculture and rural areas, a core objective of the AKIS concept. A reinforced AKIS integrates all AKIS actors and ensures knowledge flows within and across member states. Supporting conditions for a reinforced AKIS is a principal concern of National CAP Networks.

The importance of supporting interactions between different types of knowledge (e.g. know-why; know-what; know-how) was emphasised; along with the distinctions between knowledge flows, knowledge exchange, knowledge sharing and knowledge transfer. The types of knowledge and interactions between them depend on the specific focus and context of a challenge; and transitioning from linear and 'top down' forms of knowledge transfer to diverse knowledge flows is essential for a well-functioning AKIS.



The transition from the 2014-2022 CAP period to the AKIS Strategic Approach under CAP Plans 2023-2027, requires both continuation and change. Agriculture is set to be more knowledge intensive, and significant progress has already been made. More than 3,200 Operational Groups (OGs) were established between 2014 and 2022; and the next CAP draft plans signal a tripling of the number of OGs per year and an increasing diversity in scope to cover all nine CAP objectives. Many OGs address environmental and a wide diversity of CAP-related issues, serving as a test bed for numerous CAP measures.

In the CAP Strategic Plan Regulation post-2020, the funding of innovative projects will now be supported by an entire innovation ecosystem that systematically interlinks people and projects, embodying the fundamental concept of AKIS. EIP-AGRI plays a key role in connecting various relevant policies, including the national and regional levels of the CAP; Horizon Europe projects; and Operational Groups. National CAP Networks are crucial collaborators in this regard, activating networking, interactive innovation, and communication channels across the AKIS. They are specifically tasked with connecting OGs to collaborate with each other and supporting AKIS-wide actor interaction – for example, through National Contact Points and Horizon Europe multi-actor projects (Art. 126(4)(e)).

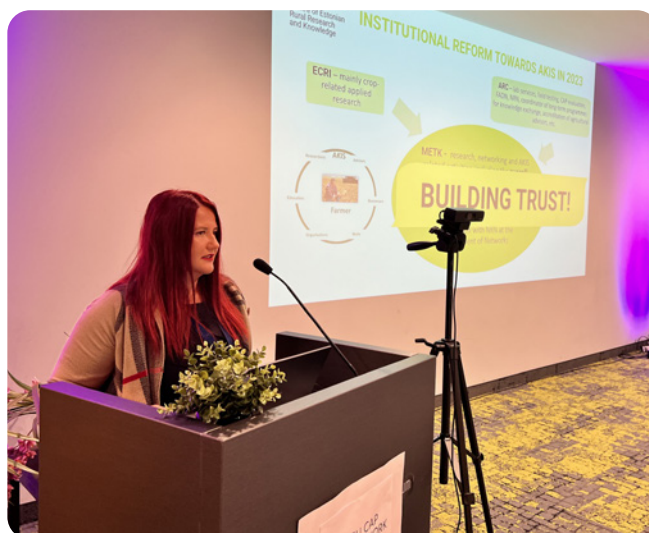
Legal provisions underpinning greater open innovation across the AKIS emphasise the importance of advisors, researchers and National CAP Networks working together (Art. 114); and integrating advisors into the AKIS in an 'inclusive way' (Art. 15 and 78). Overall, there is a significant emphasis on the role of advisors in supporting interactive innovation in the AKIS, particularly highlighted in Art. 15 (4); Art. 114 (a). This emphasis signals that advisors are a priority cohort of actors in how National CAP Networks formulate and implement their AKIS-oriented, network-enhancing strategies.

Case Study: Estonia's Agricultural Innovation Strategy

A second scene-setting presentation from the Estonian Ministry of Regional Affairs and Agriculture offered insights into how Member States can achieve the goals set out by EU-level policies. In the new CAP, Estonia has made significant investments in three main areas: support for developing knowledge exchange and innovation within the AKIS; support for advisory services; and, support for interactive innovation, particularly through EIP-AGRI Operational Groups. Both private and public sector actors are engaged, with an emphasis on creating synergies and reducing barriers for entrepreneurs. In Estonia, advisory networks, knowledge transfer services and the National CAP Network are coordinated in one place – the Centre of Estonian Rural Research and Knowledge (METK), which consolidates the operationalisation of various innovation policy instruments.



A presentation was contributed by this Centre, established in January 2023 through a merger of two research organisations. METK now supports networking activities in agriculture and rural life, in addition to research and field-testing activities. Its AKIS Centre brings together researchers and advisory activities. Fulfilling the objectives of a range of EU-level policies, METK's AKIS Centre carries out AKIS development; maps future needs; provides the back office of Advisory Services; coordinates Knowledge Exchange; and, supports Digital Solutions. The AKIS Centre cooperates daily with the National CAP Network, complementing its coordination and implementation of the CAP. The success of both is underpinned by significant experience accumulated during the implementation of previous programmes, dating back to 2004 with the 'Kodukant' village movement. Practical activities undertaken by the Estonian National CAP Network include the creation of diverse publications, podcasts, and exhibitions; as well as of new networks using webinars and the 'Network to Innovate'.



4. Main outcomes from the interactive sessions

4.1. Interactive Session One: supporting a well-functioning AKIS

4.1.1. Inspiring Examples: supporting a well-functioning AKISs

The main purpose of the first interactive session was to identify practical approaches for National CAP Networks to support enhanced networking within AKISs. To provide context and inspiration for the interactive sessions, four short presentations were delivered.

Experience from the **Austrian National CAP Network** highlighted the central challenge of cooperating across sectors and disciplines in particularly dynamic times, which give rise to new needs in rural regions. To meet these needs, the Austrian CAP network uses complementary expertise and networks, engaging in a very competent partnership with a high level of trust, which is regularly reflected on and evaluated for increased effectiveness. An AKIS Cooperation platform is a core element of the Austrian CAP Network, which engages in thematic deep dives, activities to improve functions in the AKIS, and supports interest-based activity clusters within the AKIS to develop OGs.



The **Finnish National CAP Network** focused on its novel 'Innovation Market' pavilion for OGs, start-ups, and other projects. The pavilion is a joint exhibition area featuring innovative initiatives, where the whole range of AKIS actors gathers for networking activities. It brings together multi-actor OGs and other innovative projects to showcase innovations, bringing them to end-users (focusing particularly on farmers and foresters) and supporting interactions between innovators. An open call approach, which extends internationally, is used to attract and select exhibitors/innovators. Social media activity further expands the reach and impact of the Innovation Market pavilion to potential innovators.





Experience from **Ireland's National Rural Network** (2016-2023) focused on diverse approaches including story mapping, printed material, events, vlogging, the 'Team UP' model of collaboration, and learning from evaluation. Across this multi-faceted model, several key success factors were consistently applied: adopting simple language, the use of stories and visuals, contextualising and embedding initiatives in local contexts, and a people-centric methodology. By placing such factors at the core of initiatives, 'knowledge becomes power and innovation becomes achievable'. Key to its success has been the use of 'what's going on' (existing events) to mainstream activities throughout the AKIS and collaboration with other key actors in the AKIS – such as Teagasc, the Burren *Winterage* Event and the University of Galway.



The fourth inspiring example was delivered from the **Flemish National CAP Network**. The AKIS Coordination Body, which represents the Managing Authority, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the National CAP Network, is a vital support to the CAP Network's work towards achieving its objectives. Each of these central entities keeps each other informed of mutually relevant activities and developments. They also evaluate finalised activities and learn from them; and there is transparency, open communication, and close cooperation. In turn, the AKIS Coordination Body is part of the Flemish multi-actor Platform for Agriculture and Food Research. This further emphasises how the AKIS Coordination Body and its activities are linked to diverse AKIS actors (for example, universities, practical research organisations and end-user organisations such as farmers' organisations).



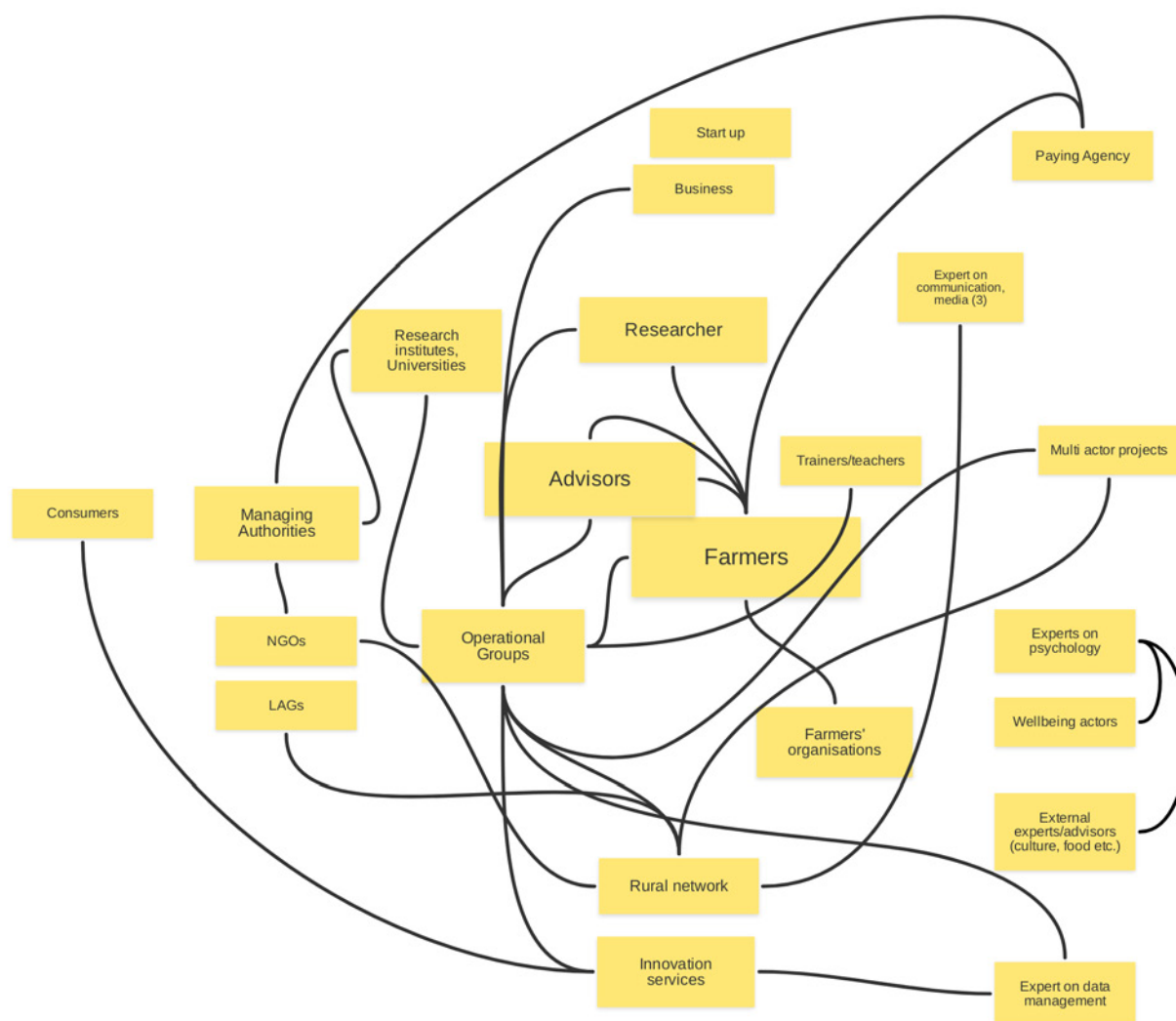
Overall, the four inspiring examples profiled crucial aspects of supporting a well-functioning AKIS, a core objective of National CAP Networks. **Cross-cutting AKIS coordination and integration** were highlighted by the AKIS Cooperation Platform of the Austrian National CAP Network and by the AKIS Coordination Body of the Flemish National CAP Network. **Inspiration for interactive innovation involving diverse actors** was showcased by the Finnish National CAP Network's Innovation Market Pavilion. The importance of **embedding interactive innovation in a relatable story, familiar place and local language** was a key feature of Ireland's National Rural Network.



4.1.2. AKIS actors, structures and flows

In the interactive session, participants first identified the actors, structures, and flows within a typical AKIS, building an impressionistic diagram to illustrate this.

Figure 1. Diagram of an impressionistic AKIS: actors, linkages & knowledge flows



Source: EU CAP Network supported by the Innovation & knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI (2024)

Participants then assessed the diagram they created, identifying how it could be strengthened to create a well-functioning AKIS, a key objective of the National CAP Networks. Core questions were:

- How can end-users such as farmers/foresters become more authentically placed at the centre of AKISs?
- How can intermediaries and brokers such as farm advisors become more useful and effective in their roles in bridging gaps between end-users and diverse AKIS actors, including researchers and enterprise supporters?
- How can researchers become more effectively engaged in translating their findings across the AKIS?



4.1.3. Features of a well-functioning AKIS

In preparation for identifying practical actions for National CAP Networks to take to support a well-functioning AKIS, participants identified key AKIS features and characteristics (Table 1).

Table 1. Summary of features of a well-functioning AKIS

What does it look like (features)?	Who is at its core?	How are actors connected?	Main functions?	What does it deliver?	To whom?
Farmers at the centre	Farmers and advisors	A dedicated entity to coordinate the AKIS	Identify the true nature of problems	Consistency of information across the AKIS – equality!	Everyone! All relevant actors
Advisors at the centre	Advisors	Intermediaries -functioning well	Connect actors	Quality control of information	Farmers
Everyone well connected – or connectable	Researchers	Easy identification and access to relevant actors, so that they can connect	Solve problems	Information about & access to funding	All rural actors
Fast information flow	Skilled and motivated intermediaries/ ambassadors for each actor type	Vocational, educational and training providers	Disseminate information – make it accessible	Sustainable practices	Consumers
Many participants/ actors	The media	Advisory services	To identify needs	New innovations	The general public
Has a good navigation map	Innovators	National CAP Networks	Information platform	Inclusion of marginalised and younger actors	Younger generations
Highly visible	Consumers	Managing Authorities	Information comes <i>from</i> farmers	Accessible and transferable results for farms	Newcomers to rural areas and farmers
Bottom-up initiatives	Experts in communication	Farmers' organisations	Actors become aware of their positions in the AKIS and can change their positions	Shifting cultural behaviours	Students
Diversity (between MS AKISs)	Companies/ private sector			Good, natural knowledge flows	

Source: EU CAP Network supported by the Innovation & knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI (2024)





4.1.4. Actions for National CAP Networks to support a well-functioning AKIS

Participants then brainstormed practical actions for National CAP Networks to support a well-functioning AKIS. Referencing the features and characteristics of a well-functioning AKIS they had just identified, they proceeded to specify practical actions to achieve those features and characteristics.

The participants focused on actions suitable for National CAP Networks to take, lead or activate in supporting a well-functioning AKIS; and they categorised the actions into thematic clusters. The clusters and actions are synergised in [Table 2](#).

Actions under the theme of **collaboration** referred both to collaboration that National CAP Networks could engage in and collaboration that National CAP Networks could facilitate among other AKIS actors. **Empowering farmers and other AKIS actors** were identified as a crucial set of actions, necessary to ensure balanced and diverse engagement to support a well-functioning AKIS. This theme highlighted farmers and foresters as important actors to empower, as they should be at the core of AKIS, and their

involvement is essential to obtain positive impacts for sustainability 'in the real world'. The vital role of National CAP Networks in **communicating** new results, practices, and solutions – emerging, for example, from Horizon Europe and OGs – emerged as necessary in supporting a well-functioning AKIS.

Practical actions to **build networks** emerged in the brainstorming process as an important area for National CAP Networks. This reflects the challenge of creating active alliances between diverse actors striving to address challenges and realise opportunities in a changing rural environment. The need to **enable** actors, by supporting diverse actors' access to routes for acquiring new skills, competencies, contacts, and information was identified as an important function of National CAP Networks. Finally, the task of **coordination** was identified as special to the role of National CAP Networks in supporting a well-functioning AKIS. This reflects their unique positions as intermediaries within national AKISs, and the bridge they provide to the activities of other EU AKISs and to resources and information from the EU CAP Network.



Table 2. Actions for National CAP Networks to support a well-functioning AKIS

Actions for National CAP Networks to support a Well-Functioning AKIS		Options for action			
Collaboration	Calendar of events	Drop-in clinics	Themed events: national and international		Showcased results from OGs
	Informal networking	Joint lunch events	Sauna/leisure/activity-based meetings		Heritage/culture/music exchanges
Empowering farmers and other AKIS actors	Peer to peer	Leveraging of peer leaders	Heritage exchange: affirming foundations & trust		
	Involvement in decision-making	Involve farmers in all AKIS boards	Multi-actor approach for research planning		Mentorship or 'hand-holding'
	Innovation camps	Showcase research-practice innovation	Hackathons	Innovation fairs/exhibitions/pavilions	
	Evaluation	Ongoing learning	Multi-actor & perspective evaluation/impact assessment		
Communication	Reaching out	Easy to read information, letters	Road shows	Involve the media in all projects	
	Digestible / Relatable information	Online webinars	Multi-actor panels at conferences		Short videos with OGs
	Project results information	Build esteem around good practices (badges)		Practice-oriented blogs/vlogs of research results	
	Keep it 'local'	Integrate to local events	Local radio	Rural media	Blog/Vlog by local actors
Building Networks	Communities of practice	Online virtual interest-based communities		Cross-border exchanges	Consumers & farmers in joint organisations
	Farmers first	Stable talks – hosts are farmers		Coordinators are farmer organisations	Farm demos as launchpads
	Reaching out	Road shows	Research lorries	Engage media & influencers	'Tinder'
Enabling	Collection of needs	Needs/motivations register	Hackathons – based on understanding needs		
	Improving policy	Insights to operationalise policy		Leadership – champions of AKIS	Leverage LEADER
	Advisors & Intermediaries	Advise advisors	Build Practice Abstracts into training modules		AKIS in farmers' schools
Coordination	Thematic organisation	Establish and build thematic interests		Ideas' workshops	Internships across the AKIS: farms, labs, retailers
	AKIS coordination	AKIS multi-actor board cooperating with ministries		Thematic AKIS mapping	Unification of intermediaries

Source: EU CAP Network supported by the Innovation & knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI (2024)



4.2. Interactive Session Two: National CAP Networks' roles and their key tasks within national AKISs

The second interactive session focused on clarifying the nature of the specific National CAP Network objectives/tasks that were the focus of the workshop, and on sharing good practices in relation to how these objectives/tasks can be effectively achieved. The objectives/tasks were as follows:

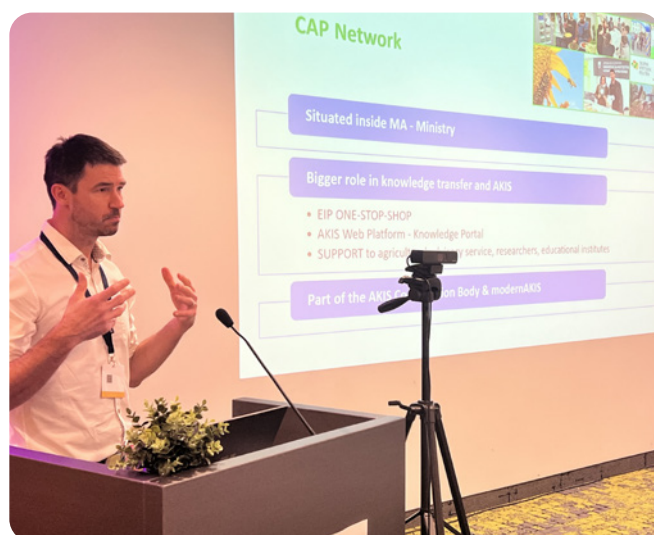
- Fostering innovation and knowledge exchange in agriculture and rural development
- Involving *all* stakeholders:
 - Identifying and targeting all relevant stakeholders
 - Better connecting with researchers and advisors

- Supporting peer-to-peer learning
- Supporting knowledge-exchange and knowledge-building processes
- Collecting information and facilitating dissemination and networking of funded structures and projects, such as EIP Operational Groups

4.2.1. Inspiring examples: National CAP Networks roles and their key tasks within national AKISs

The interactive session on National CAP Networks' roles and their key tasks within national AKISs began with three inspiring examples. The first presentation from the **Swedish Board of Agriculture** focused on the multifaceted functions of its successful knowledge hub in fulfilling roles and key tasks. Sweden's Knowledge Hub on Animal Farming addresses several challenges: lack of cooperation between actors, lack of compilation and dissemination of knowledge, lack of interaction between research, advisors and farmers, and a lack of agreement in the identification of needs. The knowledge hub has engaged in practical actions to address these challenges, including the publication of news and thematic information (in the form of films, podcasts etc.) and the development of inventories on the needs of the food industry (focusing on research, innovation, and knowledge transfer). A novel component is the development of a barn to centre the hub activities.

A presentation from the **Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food in Slovenia** highlighted the key challenges of strengthening the financing of research activities; enhancing the exchange of knowledge and innovations by **setting up an Operational Group serving as Knowledge Hub on various themes**; and improving cooperation and coordination among all AKIS actors. The National CAP Network in Slovenia is based in the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food, providing a 'one stop shop' for OGs, as well as a knowledge platform for the AKIS and dedicated support to advisory services, researchers, and educational institutes. The coordination of innovation brokers and the moderation of the knowledge platform are core activities that lead to the successful collecting, communicating, and disseminating of the latest project results.



A project-oriented perspective supporting the achievement of National CAP Network objectives was offered by the **Horizon Europe project EU-FarmBook**. The presentation emphasised the importance of strengthening knowledge flows. The project seeks to generate a single EU-wide, user-friendly platform to deliver practical knowledge into the hands of farmers, foresters, and advisors across Europe. Aiming to multiply the use of practice-oriented knowledge, the project is clustering a broad and diverse range of existing, available knowledge into thematic categories for intuitive access by end-users. Interacting with National CAP Networks is a central strategy of the project to achieve its results.



Considering the key objectives/tasks of national CAP Networks that are the focus of this workshop, the three inspiring examples are particularly illuminating. The Knowledge Hub of the Swedish Board of Agriculture collects thematic practice-oriented knowledge, thus actively **fostering innovation**. The Knowledge Hub **supports knowledge-exchange and knowledge-building** processes; and **facilitates dissemination**. The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food in Slovenia is setting up an OG as a one-stop-shop that engages **all relevant stakeholders** and **connects with researchers and advisors**. The unique potential of the EU-FarmBook project is that it **collects EU-wide information and facilitates dissemination and networking of funded structures and projects**.

4.2.2. Achieving National CAP Network objectives/tasks: 'know-who' to involve and 'know-what' actions to take

Participants worked in breakout groups to brainstorm how National CAP Networks could take practical actions to achieve the main objectives/tasks that were the focus of this workshop. Each breakout group focused on one objective or task. Following a preliminary discussion on the nature of the chosen objective or task at each table, participants proceeded to identify who is involved in achieving the task and who is impacted by it. They then shared 'tried and tested' good practices to achieve the objective or task, as well as ideas on how to implement it.



The results, pertaining to each objective or task, are presented in I–VI below.

I. Involving All Stakeholders (i) Identifying and Targeting All Relevant Stakeholders – Who to Involve & Actions for National CAP Networks to Take

Who to involve?



What action to take?

- Start a controversy and see who reacts
- Find a common, themed task for stakeholders (of interest to them)
- Use a questionnaire for recruiting actors (for above common task)
- Engage local/regional actors
- 'Tinder' for AKIS
- Make a call for engagement in a specific topic
- Engage publicly known lead persons (using their networks)
- Identify and associate relevant actors to specific objectives/needs
- Create a network map of AKIS actors and act upon it to achieve change in the network
- CAP Strategic Plan chapter for AKIS actors
- Engage with OGs
- Engage with projects like ModernAKIS and ATTRACTISS
- Communicate with authorities who have duties in relation to AKIS topics

II. Involving All Stakeholders (ii) Better Connecting with Researchers and Advisors – Who to Involve & Actions for National CAP networks to Take

Who to involve?



What action to take?

- Social events with local food
- Show the benefits (bonus, promotion, sustainability)
 - Actions/activities that are tailor-made for farmers
- Strategic actions
- Project to create a bridge between research project coordinators
 - Targeted information from cooperation offices
 - Build trust (multi-directional) between farmers, public researchers, advisors
- Communication actions
- Use of platforms to reach out to researchers e.g. EU- FarmBook, YouTube etc
 - Research outputs easily understood to stakeholders
- Actions in practice
- Participate in EU/national info days for funding support
 - Focus groups in specific thematic areas to investigate solutions
 - Connect National Contact Points with AKIS via Horizon Europe
 - Ensure advisors and researchers are core to innovation brokerage activity
 - Study visits in different countries (learn about best practices)
 - Joint trainings (researchers, advisors, farmers)
 - Incentives



III. Fostering Innovation and Knowledge Exchange in Agriculture and Rural Development – Who to Involve & Actions for National CAP Networks to take

Who to involve?



What action to take?

- Knowledge-sharing workshops
- Co-creation/multi-actor workshops
- Financing – sharing tools/opportunities
- Reflecting on negative experiences
- Connect dots/routing services
- Administrations synchronising EIP calls (transnational cooperation)
- Pilot new collaborations and assess their challenges and benefits
- Grant for demonstration initiatives
- Early proof of concept
- Offer networking app' in external events
- Support for OGs to join Horizon Europe consortia (seed-funding, mentorship, administrative support)
- Communications towards target groups
- Labs with advisors and researchers to exchange knowledge
- Online meetings between agents, CAP networks
- Brokerage facility or event
- Rural fellowships to students

IV. Supporting Knowledge-Exchange and Knowledge Building Processes – Who to Involve & What Actions for National CAP Networks to Take

Who to involve?



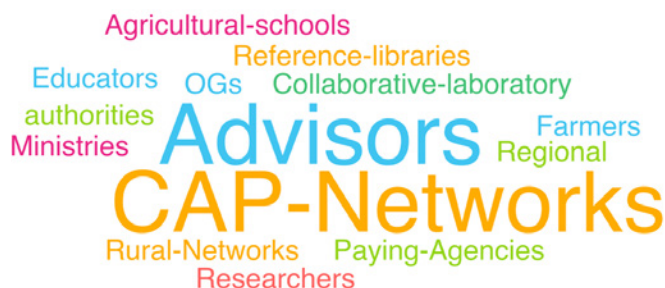
What action to take?

- Targeted training
- Workshops on specific topics
- Open farm events/demo farms
- Field visits + give something in return – lunch at a field visit
- Thematic excursions
- Good practices awards/fair/show
- Story telling (with demo farms)
- Digital platforms
- Creating networks
- Innovation brokers
- Innovation Hub
- Inventory of needs and barriers and drivers
- Selecting right actors
- Support on proposal writing
- Evaluation in different levels
- Survey of farmers' needs – content and methods
- Hold networking events (workshops, seminars, focus groups)
- Organise thematic EIP events (e.g. demo farms) to share the results
- Podcasts
- Webinars
- Online workshops/virtual demo events



V. Collecting Information and Facilitating Dissemination and Networking of Funded Structures and Projects, such as EIP Operational Groups – Who to Involve & Actions for National CAP Networks to Take

Who to involve?



What action to take?

- > Open days at the project (disseminate results but also exchange ideas with the project partners)
- > Special dissemination people (information ambassadors for CAP Networks) such as rural women
- > Functional database, project reservoir
- > TV show
- > Podcast series for dissemination
- > Provide good visuals for dissemination
- > Better use of different media in general
- > Avoid “spam”
- > Hackathon for gathering new OG ideas
- > Call to gather information and practices to be part of “AKIS family”
- > Interpretation specialists to translate jargon to “normal” language.
- > Interpretation specialists to present the results in an accessible way
- > Use interpretation tools to disseminate results to other countries
- > Obligation to publish OG results
- > Tour for CAP Network to collect and disseminate information
- > Stages at an agricultural fair (as in the example from Finland)
- > Competition of best projects
- > Poster sessions at events
- > Cross-visits (information exchange)
- > Demonstrations at farms and research institutes

VI. Peer to Peer Learning – Who to Involve & Actions for National CAP Networks to Take

Who to involve?



What action to take?

- > B2B (business to business) events
- > Farm Tinder
- > One-to-one talk
- > Interdisciplinary roundtables
- > Focus groups
- > Discussion groups
- > Innovation thematic hub, thematic networks
- > Design thinking workshops
- > Creation of thematic hubs (for women, young people)
- > Experts who facilitate meetings between people
- > Traineeships
- > Internships
- > Workshops
- > Vlogs
- > Newsletters
- > Regular meetings with AKIS actors
- > Sauna & dinner – local markets as a place for meetings
- > Cross/farm/study visits
- > Hackathon
- > English courses



4.2.3. Ideas marketplace: pitching actions to achieve key tasks

After participants had brainstormed both actors to engage and actions to take in the National CAP Networks' achievement of key tasks, each participant proceeded to elaborate a single idea in more detail and to represent this in an ideas marketplace.

Each participant argued for their idea, which they believed could be highly effective in achieving one of the key objectives/tasks for National CAP Networks. Each participant not only presented their own idea, but also listened to the ideas of three colleagues within the ideas marketplace. Scores for their ideas were mutually agreed upon and distributed.



Following exchanges by participants in the ideas marketplace, participants pinned their ideas to a 'talking wall' display, where ideas were sorted according to their overall score. In a plenary interviewing style, participants were invited to come forward and present their ideas. Some of the highest scoring ideas were presented, as well as a selection of ideas with varying scores pertaining to the achievement of different National CAP Networks' key tasks. Examples of the ideas presented are as follows:



Figure 2. Examples of ideas formulated for 'ideas marketplace'**Task: Fostering innovation and knowledge exchange in agriculture and rural development**

Student group work: contact farmers in specific regions.- identify & work on their needs.

Select an issue/challenge to focus on and seek out innovators, entrepreneurs, national and international experts to collaborate.

Make the solution happen!

Task: Peer-to-peer learning

The forest Management Hub Hackathon is a series of events that bring together forest owners, researchers, forest managers and advisors. During these events, participants are divided into small teams to solve a problem or develop an innovation. Forest owners provide their practical perspectives based on their experiences.

At the conclusion of the event, teams are invited to present their results. Following the event, the team begins implementing the proposed action or seeks support to do so.

Task: Involving all stakeholders (i) Identifying and targeting all relevant stakeholders

Invite stakeholders from defined groups in the strategic plan at the national level. Arrange a workshop for them to rapidly map out the Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS) for their sector of interest, identifying key actors. Based on the workshop results, organise a meeting that includes all identified actors. Break into regions/localities as necessary and continue with events. Systematically cross-pollinate with other actor networks.

Task: Supporting knowledge exchange & knowledge building

Create labs where advisors or innovation brokers prioritise information worth sharing and identify information gaps and needs.

Farmers may not have time, self-awareness or courage to share their good practices/achievements and solutions and they may also struggle to articulate their needs. Advisors and innovation brokers, using person-to-person trusted exchanges, are better placed to fulfil this role.

Task: Involving all stakeholders (ii) How to better connect with researchers and advisors

Use various networking events as 'focus groups' to gather views and perspectives on a topic. Share the results, such as the perspectives of a particular group on a specific theme, with other groups working on the same theme.

For instance, the insights gathered from an event for researchers should be shared at events attended by advisors and policymakers. Ensure there is a smooth flow of information between different groups.

Task: Collecting information and facilitating dissemination and networking between funded structures

Arrange Cross visits involving all stakeholders to obtain and disseminate information and best practices.

Encourage active observation (Walk) and open communication (Talk).

Establish working groups comprised of similar actors to enhance interpretation and communication.

Implement a systematic data collection process, utilising web platforms, databases and journals to gather suggestions and insights.

Source: EU CAP Network supported by the Innovation & knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI (2024)

In the session summary, participants identified three actions using an online poll that they would take following the workshop to achieve each of the main objectives/tasks of National CAP Networks. These are presented in [Annex 1](#).



4.3. Interactive Session Three: Transnational Collaboration

The third interactive session centred on international/transnational cooperation and comprised two parts. The initial segment aimed at fostering collaboration among National CAP Networks; and between National CAP Networks and the EU CAP Network.

4.3.1. Inspiring example: Transnational Cooperation

The theme of cooperation in Part 1 was introduced by the inspiring example of the Nordic-Baltic Network to Innovate. This collaborative initiative was launched by CAP networks from the Nordic and Baltic regions. The projects and initiatives of the network advance innovative solutions for future EU agriculture, food production and rural development. The network conducts online events, focusing on various topics such as farm data, waste management, smart farming, and renewable energy. To address the challenges of increasing technical expertise for engaging with audiences and attracting participants to online events, the Network to Innovate emphasises creating events that are inspirational, communicative, and conducive to networking.



Interactive session on Transnational Cooperation: Part 1

The initial part of the interactive session aimed at promoting collaboration among National CAP Networks, identifying synergies and complementarities, and pinpointing opportunities for collaboration between National CAP Networks and the European CAP Network. Participants also looked into the roles of Managing Authorities in supporting these cooperation activities.



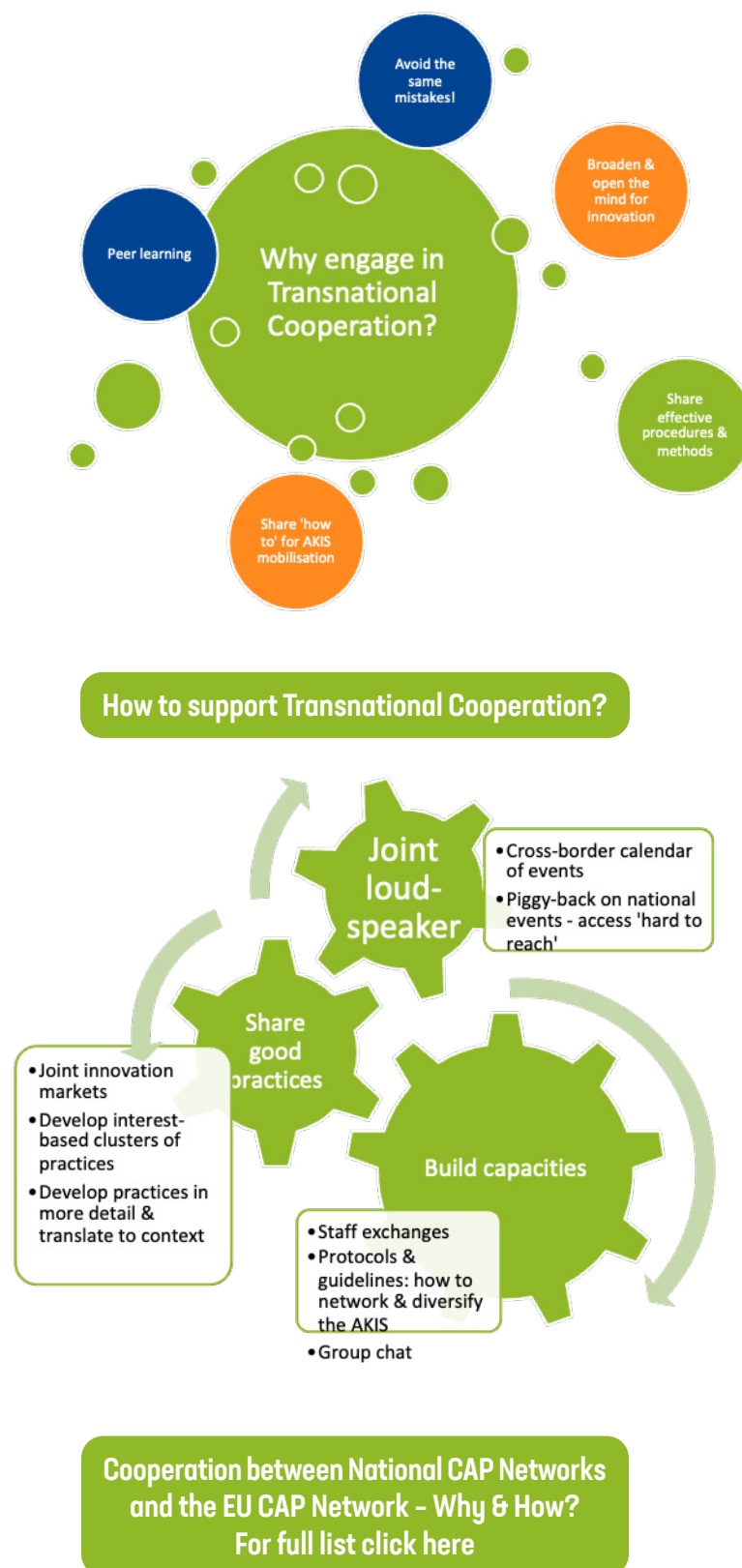
4.3.2. National CAP Networks engaging in transnational cooperation: know-why (benefits) and know-how (actions)

Participants first addressed the question of what motivates cooperation, what can be gained and why National CAP Networks would consider establishing and progressing cooperation with other National CAP Networks. This was an important first step – sharing and clarifying the motivations underpinning cooperation and the value and benefits that cooperating delivers – before moving on to identifying specific, operational actions to further those motivations and achieve the benefits.

Following the focus on cooperation between National CAP Networks, participants concentrated on cooperation between National CAP Networks and the EU CAP Network. They shared and identified the motivations and benefits associated with cooperating (Why?), and then discussed specific actions to implement effective cooperation (How?).



Figure 3. Transnational Cooperation between National CAP Networks & between National CAP Networks and the EU CAP Network – Know-Whys & Know-Hows



Source: EU CAP Network supported by the Innovation & knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI (2024)



Participants then identified the support that the roles of Managing Authorities can offer with the tasks of stimulating collaboration between National CAP Networks; and identifying opportunities for

collaboration between National CAP Networks and the European CAP Network.

Figure 4. Suggested ideas for Managing Authorities to further transnational cooperation



Source: EU CAP Network supported by the Innovation & knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI (2024)

Interactive session on Transnational Cooperation: Part 2

The second part of the interaction session focused on identifying practical scenarios for National CAP Networks to activate/support cross-border and transnational cooperation, enhancing cooperation with National Contact Points (Horizon Europe). The session aimed to share good practices and promising future approaches for transnational collaboration leveraging AKIS, including creating opportunities for Operational Groups using various instruments.



4.3.3. Presentation and poster-session

The session was introduced by a presentation from DG-AGRI and a poster session, showcasing examples of project-oriented transnational cooperation in practice. The presentation from DG AGRI focused on Horizon programmes supporting transnational cooperation for AKIS. A range of policies (such as The European Green Deal, Organic Action Plan, Farm to Fork etc.) have set ambitious targets, necessitating both 'stepping up' and 'speeding up' efforts. Making the transition from strategy to action and using the interactive innovation model and enhanced knowledge flows are core approaches in this context. Supporting transnational cooperation to enhance AKIS interactions and knowledge flows is a specific focus of several Horizon Europe projects, many of which profiled at the workshop's poster session, which featured:

- > [modernAKIS](#)
- > [ATTRACTISS](#)
- > [EUFarmBook](#)
- > [PREMIERE](#)
- > [AF4EU](#)
- > [B-Thenet](#)
- > [FOREST4EU](#)
- > [BroilerNET](#)
- > [NUTRI-KNOW](#)



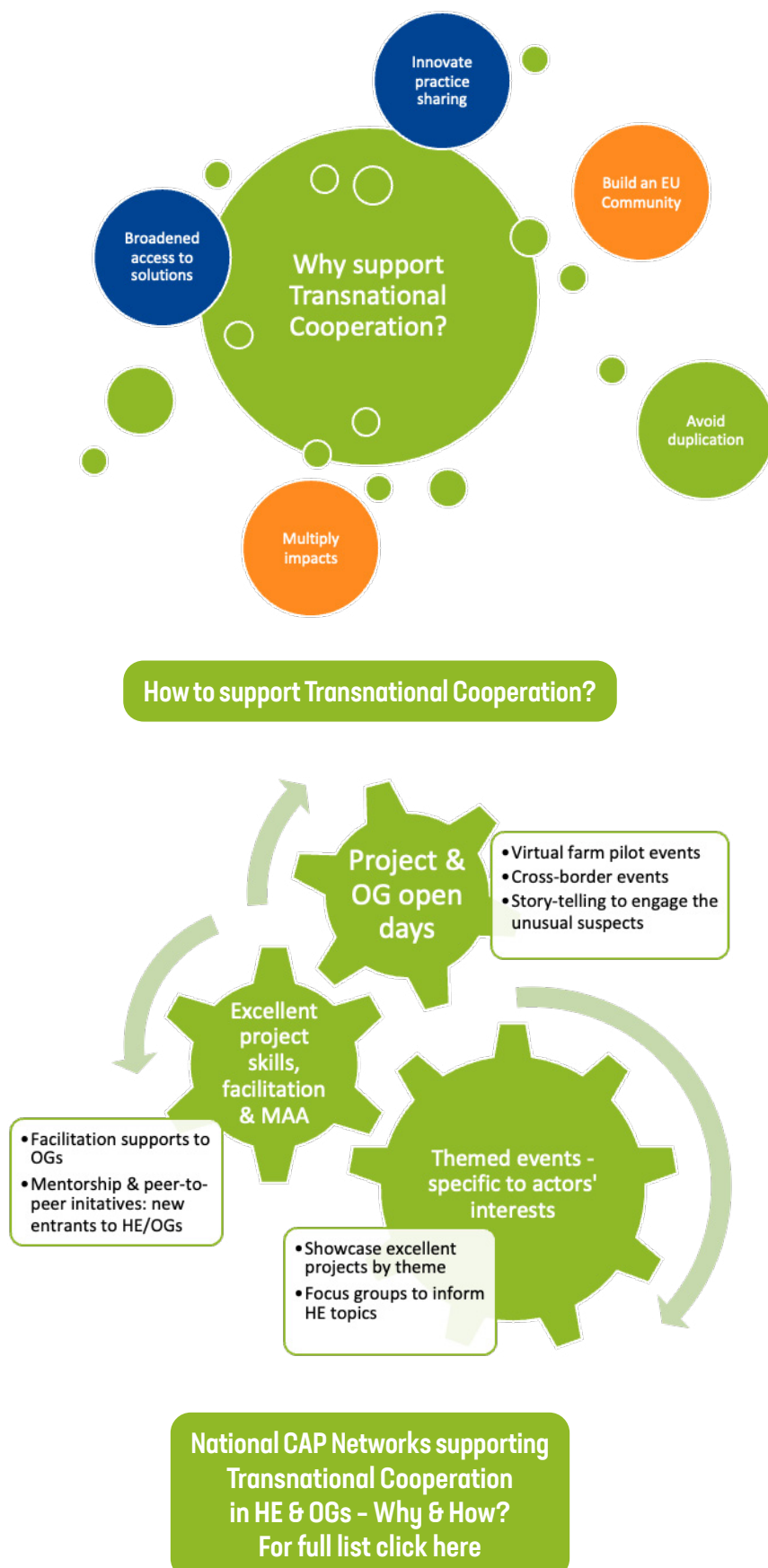
4.3.4. National CAP Networks supporting transnational cooperation: know-why (benefits) and know-how (actions)

After participants had the opportunity to engage with representatives of the aforementioned projects, they started Part 2 of the interactive session on transnational cooperation. Participants brainstormed reasons why National CAP Networks support and should enhance

support of transnational cooperation, emphasising the benefits to be gained. Practical knowledge was then shared on how to activate and support cross-border and transnational cooperation.



Figure 5. Transnational Cooperation: National CAP Networks supporting HE & OGs – Know-Whys & Know-Hows

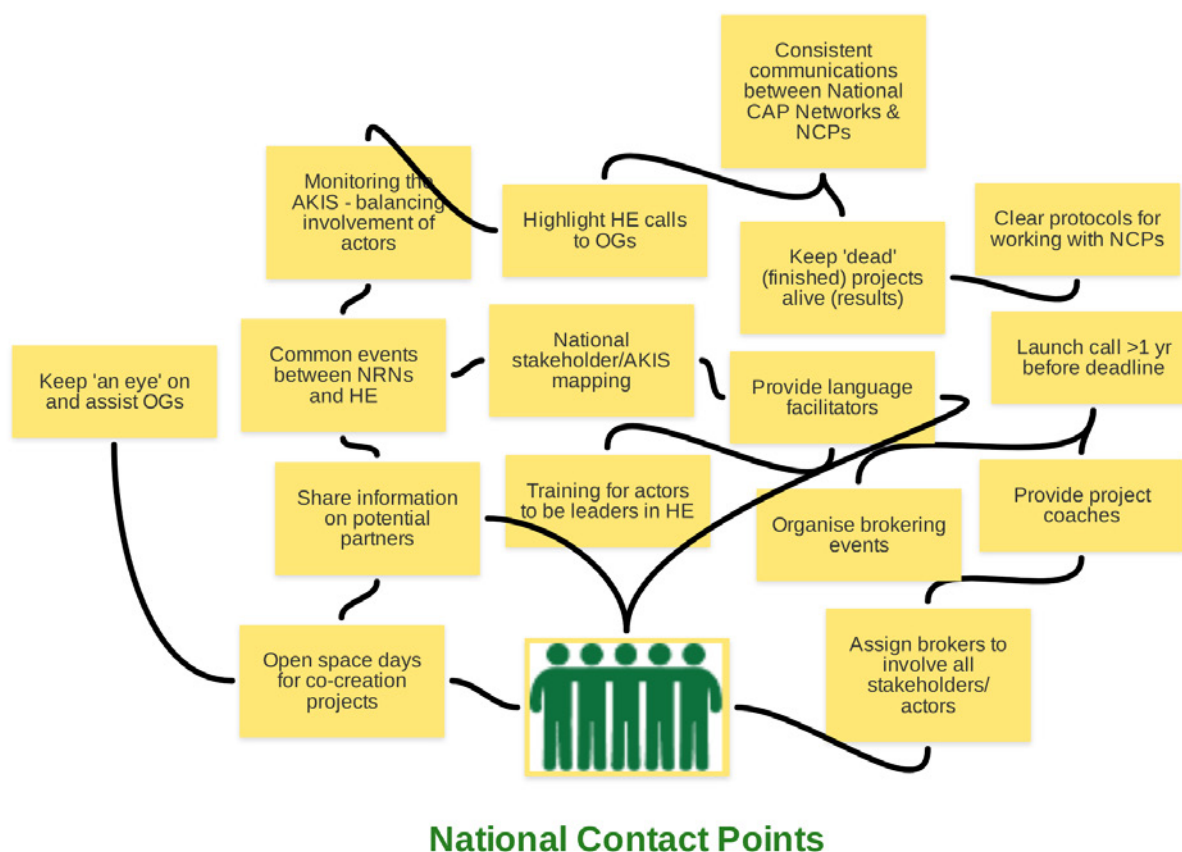


Source: EU CAP Network supported by the Innovation & knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI (2024)



How to involve and benefit from the support of National Contact Points in actions to achieve effective transnational cooperation was particularly emphasised.

Figure 6. Suggested ideas for National Contact Points to further transnational cooperation



Source: EU CAP Network supported by the Innovation & knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI (2024)

The interactive session concluded with participants engaging in a poll, where they identified the positive impacts arising from transnational cooperation; factors driving the success of cooperation; and, the threats that hinder its success. These are overviewed in [Annex 3](#).



5. Lessons learnt and needs for the future

National CAP Networks are relatively new entities, yet many Member States have developed significant experience over previous programming periods. They bring that experience to the broadened roles that National CAP Networks have in fulfilling tasks and objectives that are crucial for mobilising and sustaining innovation in EU agriculture and rural development in the current programme.

Participants at this first European CAP Network workshop 'National Networking for Innovation' shared good practices and exchanged knowledge on how specific objectives of National CAP Networks can be realised. A primary aim of the workshop, responding to a need cited at a first meeting in Croatia (22-23 March 2023), was to share knowledge and experiences to build a stronger foundation of expertise to support the activities of National CAP Networks EU-wide.

The breadth of expertise and practical expertise shared at the workshop (e.g. know-why; know-what; know-who; know-how) is reflected in the extent and diversity of outcomes from the interactive sessions. A cross-cutting lesson from these interactive sessions is that practical approaches must be **people-centred and challenge-centred**. Moreover, bundling multiple practical approaches and tools is likely to be necessary to ensure that different actors across the AKIS are effectively engaged and mobilised for innovation.

The focus of this first workshop was on specific tasks and objectives, identified as often interrelated and mutually dependent in how innovation is mobilised and sustained. Fostering innovation and knowledge exchange in agriculture and rural development was ranked as the primary priority objective of National CAP networks by participants in the workshop ([Annex 4](#)). For this to occur, all stakeholders in innovation initiatives must be involved so that innovation is fuelled by a sufficiently diverse range of knowledge and for it to deliver far-reaching benefits. To involve all stakeholders

effectively, it is necessary to employ tried and tested approaches to identify and target the relevant stakeholders necessary in the first instance. Tried and tested approaches, as well as new and novel approaches were shared to achieve this. Furthermore, within the aim of involving all stakeholders, the workshop focussed on the importance of National CAP Networks to better connect with researchers and advisors, considering their key role in providing content for and coordinating knowledge flows in well-functioning AKISs.

Practical approaches were shared regarding supporting the specific objective of peer-to-peer learning, a key success factor in well-functioning AKISs, and necessary for scaling up and translating knowledge to have practical relevance and value in diverse rural contexts. Throughout all these activities, knowledge-exchange and knowledge-building processes are supported, further fuelled by new information flows. In this regard, collecting information and facilitating the dissemination and networking of funded structures and projects, such as EIP Operational Groups, is a necessary ingredient for success – providing knowledge as fuel for innovation across all AKIS cohorts.

The know-why and know-how of transnational cooperation – between National CAP Networks; between National CAP Networks and the EU CAP Network; and through Horizon Europe projects & Operational Groups – were clearly stated in this workshop. Participants demonstrated the benefits of transnational cooperation at the workshop itself, where they shared knowledge and good practices and made progress in building their own community of practitioners across borders. The outcomes of their collective work, summarised in this report, represents a first step in consolidating an EU-wide knowledge base for existing and future work. Future workshops will focus on other important objectives and tasks that National CAP Networks are undertaking as central agencies for innovation in EU AKISs.



6. Further reading

All information related to [the 1st EU CAP Network Workshop 'National Networking for innovation' is available on the event's webpage](#), including:

Workshop documents

- › Participants List
- › Speaker Biographies
- › Agenda

Background documents

- › AKIS-related provisions in the CAP Strategic Plans Regulation
- › The AKIS strategy tools and related CAP interventions

Presentations

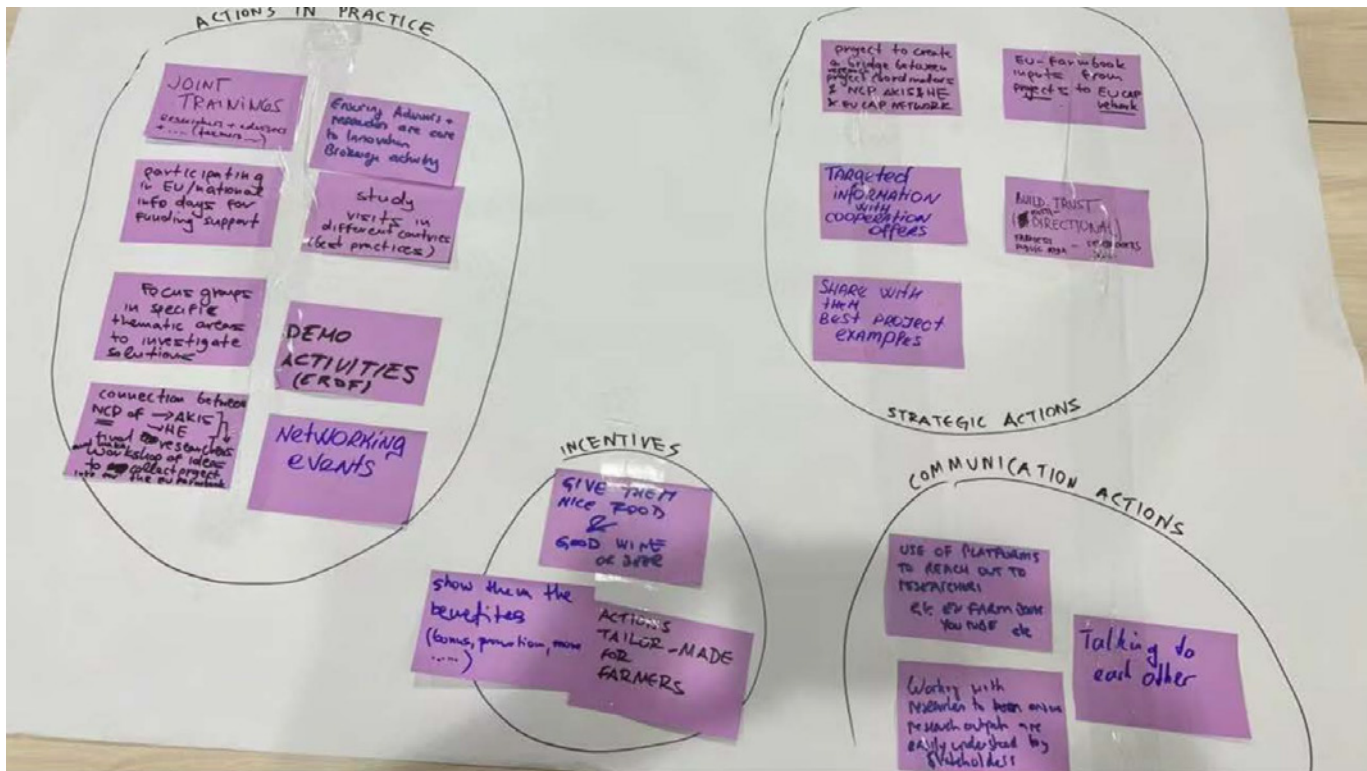
- › Estonia's approach to innovation in the CAP – Marko Gorban
- › European CAP Strategic Plan framework for National CAP Networks' role in AKIS – Inge Van Oost
- › Estonian approach to national networking for innovation and knowledge exchange – Pille Koorberg
- › European CAP Network – Johanna Rohrhofer
- › 'Innovation Market' pavilion for OGs, startups and projects – Tuija Kallio
- › Cultivating Knowledge: A Journey Through Ireland's National Rural Network and AKIS Initiatives – Maura Farrell
- › AKIS and the Flemish Rural Network – Margo Weckx
- › Knowledge hub – Animal Farming – Frida Sporre
- › National Networking for innovation in Slovenia – Matej Štepec & Joži J. Cvelbar
- › The EU-FarmBook: Strengthening the knowledge flows in your AKIS and the Horizon Europe project EU-FarmBook – Inge De Bo
- › Network to innovate – cooperation between Nordic-Baltic countries – Konstantin Mihhejev
- › Horizon programmes supporting transnational cooperation for AKIS – Natalia Brzezina



Annex 1: Results of online poll: Main actions that participants would take to implement key objectives/tasks of the National CAP Network

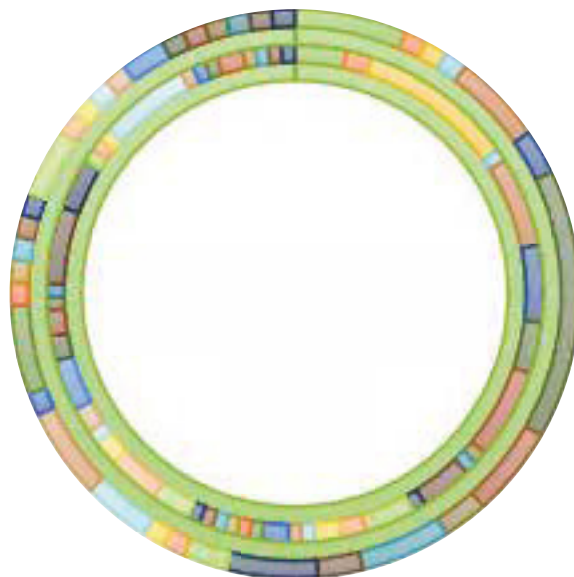
CAP National Network Objectives

1. **Fostering innovation and knowledge exchange** in agriculture and rural development
2. **Involving *all* stakeholders:**
 - i) Identifying and targeting **all** relevant stakeholders
 - ii) How to better connect with **researchers and advisors**
3. **Supporting peer-to-peer learning**
4. Supporting **knowledge-exchange and knowledge-building** processes
5. Collecting information and facilitating **dissemination and networking** of funded structures and projects, such as **EIP Operational Groups**



Annex 2

Cooperation across borders: National CAP Networks & the EU CAP Network - know-why & know-how

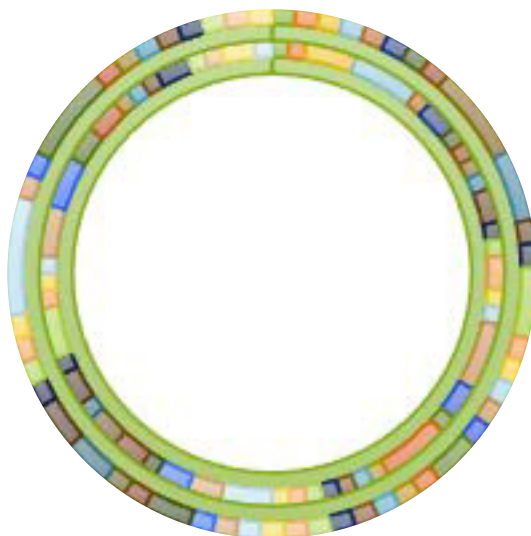


- | | |
|---|--|
| ■ Influence policy change | ■ Motivation & Inspiration |
| ■ Learn about policy/implementation | ■ Exchange knowledge informally |
| ■ Learn about other MS | ■ Pursue common goals (CAP) |
| ■ Get help to achieve goals | ■ Learn about common problems |
| ■ Get feedback for improvement | ■ Build capacity |
| ■ Share good practices | ■ Data/information sharing database |
| ■ Brokerage events for TN projects | ■ Identify common problems for OG projects |
| ■ New news and plans | ■ New ideas |
| ■ A platform to disseminate success factors | ■ Search for partners for cooperation |
| ■ EU CAP network courses and workshops | ■ Speed up networking |

Source: EU CAP Network supported by the Innovation & knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI (2024)



Cooperation across borders: National CAP Networks supporting Transnational Cooperation between Operational Groups and in Horizon Europe



- | | |
|--|---|
| Change course before too late | Contribute national knowledge |
| Involve farmers, researchers, advisors | Refine actual practical problems |
| Bring solutions & problems | Synergise effects in MS |
| Manage new challenges | Utilise all competencies |
| Add value | Bring experience & Knowledge |
| Think & learn across MS borders | Foster innovation across MS |
| New project participants -funded | Improve innovation, Knowledge Exchange and Knowledge Transfer |
| Financial support | Broaden solutions |
| Technical & Financial support | Reach the unreached |
| Build familiarity- EU community | Multiply impacts |
| Support NCPs in MS | Avoid project/funding duplication |
| Assist CAP SP in MS | Assistance from international peers |
| Break out 'research lorries' | Access to previous results |
| MS suggest topics | Innovate practice sharing |
| Grow ideas: root to transnational | Peer/Social learning |
| OGs part of business sector | Avoid duplication |
| New 'blood' - cross pollination | Transfer knowledge |
| Solve climate change | Thematic Networks Knowledge Transfer |
| Identify shared challenges & solutions | Find information |
| Bigger picture of Thematic Networks innovation | Multiply impacts |

Source: EU CAP Network supported by the Innovation & knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI (2024)



Annex 3: Results of online poll: threats that hinder successful cooperation

What are the main threats (to successful cooperation)? Name them!

78 responses



Annex 4: Workshop poll results



Please rank these objectives in order of your current, first, priority importance for your new CAP National Network



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