

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

6 June 2024

All presentations and media from the 6th SolKE meeting can be found on the meeting's [EU CAP Network webpage](#).

Welcome and Introduction

The SolKE members were welcomed by **Hugo Almeida, Unit D1 “Rural areas and networks”, DG AGRI**. Hugo presented the most important developments in EIP-AGRI since the Subgroup meeting in March 2024. He began by highlighting that the number of Operational Groups (OGs) continues to rise, and most projects are available in the [online project database on the EU CAP Network website](#). This database will soon include projects funded under CAP 2023-2027 and Horizon Europe projects.

The website itself is now accessible in 24 languages (machine translation). Its content is continuously increasing, and so Hugo explained some of the basic principles of how to navigate the website. Each strand of the EU CAP Network has a different colour code, and all inputs are clustered according to 49 different topics. Each topic contains information on the latest publications, news, upcoming events, and projects. A Stakeholders “toolkit” is also available on the website, where the EU CAP Network logo and materials can be downloaded.

The annual [Agrinnovation magazine](#) and the brochure on EIP-AGRI Operational Groups were published in April 2024. Upcoming publications are the thematic newsletter on OGs and the brochures on the Conference and EIP-AGRI Innovation Awards.

The [EU CAP Network conference ‘EIP-AGRI Operational Groups: Innovation in practice’](#) took place in Estoril, Portugal, on 6 - 8 May. This was the biggest event organised by the EU CAP Network. The objective of this conference was to celebrate the success of the EIP-AGRI OGs, and to support the next generation of these projects. The conference welcomed about 500 participants from all Member States, including over 175 OGs. The programme of the Conference included field visits to 4 different locations, plenary sessions, an innovation exhibition with 85 stands, the EIP-AGRI Innovation Awards ceremony, and 7 parallel thematic workshops. The event was revisited through the [awards ceremony aftermovie](#).

Orsolya Frizon Somogyi, Deputy Head of “Unit F2 - Research and Innovation”, DG AGRI, presented an update on the latest developments in Horizon Europe. The Horizon Europe Strategic Plan 2025-2027 was published in April 2024. On top of the two existing

strategic partnerships, a new co-funded European Partnership on Forests and Forestry for a Sustainable Future is planned for this period. The [Work Programme 2023-2024 amendment](#) calls close on 8 September 2024, and include three topics relevant to agriculture.



The Horizon Europe Cluster 6 Work Programme for 2025 is currently under preparation, and there is an ongoing stakeholder feedback opportunity. The Work Programme 2025 is planned to be published in Q2 2025.

2023 was an important year for the EU Mission Soil, as the first calls for living labs were published. Soon, five living lab projects (i.e. 25 new Living Labs) will kick off their activities. A new call for the 2024 Mission Soil Work Programme is open until 8 October 2024, and info days are planned to present the topics. The first Mission Soil week in Spain was a success, and the next edition will take place in Brussels on 12-13 November 2024. Orsolya invited SolKE members to block this date in their agendas. The Mission Soil manifesto is close to reaching 3000 signatories. Awareness is increasing, and there is a need to continue promoting the manifesto to make change happen on the ground.

Horizon Europe projects were also present at the EU CAP Network Conference in Estoril. One of them, EU FarmBook, is developing a digital platform to support the agricultural sector by providing a comprehensive repository of best practices, research findings, and practical tools. Orsolya invited SolKE members to contribute to the EU FarmBook platform by providing information from projects. It is key to build up a useful tool.

Session I: EU CAP Network activities on innovation & knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI: annual work programme 2024-2025

Pacôme Eloua Eyenga, Team Leader EIP-AGRI Support Facility, EU CAP Network, introduced the next annual work programme of the EIP-AGRI Support Facility. He presented a video with a summary of the programme, highlighting the topics, format, and calendar planning for the 2024-2025 networking activities:



Three Focus Groups

- production of protein crops under climate change
- local perennial plant genetic resources in view of climate change and biodiversity loss
- alternative solutions for livestock product differentiation

Networking events

- workshop on “National Networking for Innovation and Knowledge exchange”
- workshop on “Circular bioeconomy - valorisation of forestry by-products and residues”
- seminar on “Robotics and Artificial Intelligence in farming and forestry”
- workshop on “Innovation in logistics and position of farmers in a supply chain”
- seminar on “Demonstration farms”
- stand-alone brokerage activity
- three cross-visits between OGs (topics will be announced later in the year)

Ad-hoc expert meeting

AWP4- Quarter 1			AWP4- Quarter 2			AWP4 - Quarter 3			AWP4 - Quarter 4		
QUARTER 3/2024			QUARTER 4/2024			QUARTER 1/2025			QUARTER 2/2025		
JUL	AUG	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUNE
				1 st meetings of Focus Groups					2 nd meetings of Focus Groups		
						Workshop on 'National Networking for innovation and Knowledge exchange'	Seminar on 'Robotics and Artificial intelligence (AI) in farming and forestry'	Workshop on 'Circular Bioeconomy - Valorisation of by-products'		Workshop on 'Innovation in logistics to improve the position of farmers in a supply chain'	Seminar on 'Demonstration farms'
								Stand-alone brokerage activity			
			EU CAP Network Steering Group	7 th SolKE meeting	EU CAP Network Assembly			8 th SolKE meeting		EU CAP Network Steering Group	9 th SolKE meeting
											Ad-hoc Experts meeting
								3 x Multiple Cross visits			

Figure: Calendar of EIP-AGRI Support Facility networking activities in 2024-2025.

Session II: News from SolKE members

SolKE members had the opportunity to share, in small groups, relevant updates and activities aimed at fostering innovation and knowledge exchange from their country or organisation. Participants were then invited to share their takeaway experiences from the discussions, or to share something from their own experiences.

In Flanders, Belgium, there is an innovative investment measure which provides funding for technologies that are new in the region. This includes an element of risk which can be tested through an OG project.

In the Veneto region, Italy, there is an umbrella funding scheme to interlink articles 77 and 78 of the CAP Strategic Plans Regulation. This is an interesting way to help OGs disseminate their results from the start. This was successfully tested during the last programming period and will therefore be proposed for implementation in the coming period as well.

Finland began the implementation of an impact acceleration plan with supportive actions for OGs. The call for applications is open until the end of August 2024, after which selected OGs will be provided with supportive tools to increase the impact of their results. Completed projects or those that will be finished at the end of this year can apply, but Finland sees the biggest potential for the latter type of projects. Additionally, Finland has an ongoing open call for OGs (including transnational projects).

In Poland, the OGs database has grown to 438 projects. The Paying Agency is being encouraged to integrate all OGs into the SFC. All 16 regions have the responsibility to organise regional summits. There are also biannual national-level events for networking, where workshops for future OGs take place. In addition, regional innovation brokers receive training on soft skills, among others. There is a large innovation broker network to help support OG networks, including concluded projects.

Austria is conducting a follow-up activity with OG projects, aiming to identify the key factors to include in calls to encourage and deliver long-term impact with structural transformation. There is an ongoing open call for OGs which will close at the end of June 2024.

Hungary is planning a call for OGs.

In Sweden, there is a network of innovation brokers who visit farmers and help them understand how they can apply and get funding from the CAP Strategic Plan.

As a result of the call for OGs in Wallonia, Belgium, there are three Operational Groups with partners from Luxembourg.

Croatia has started the accreditation of private advisors (300 advisors are already accredited).

Session III: EU CAP Network activities - how are their results being used at the Member State level

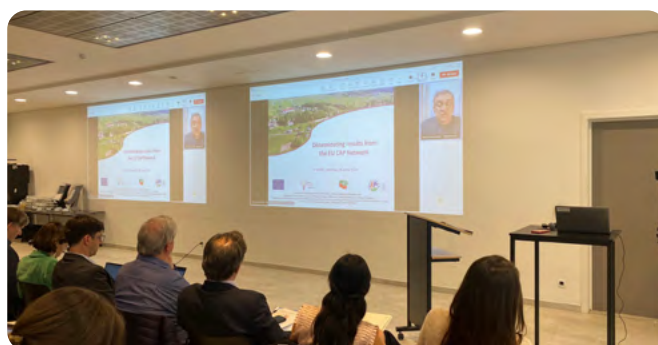
To kick off this session, SolKE members were introduced to two inspirational examples of what can be done as follow-up to SolKE meetings and EU CAP Network activities.

Giorgio Trentin, AREPO representative to the SolKE, presented different follow-up steps he takes after activities he joins. Following SolKE meetings, he reports back to AREPO, shares knowledge with associated regions, and promotes the outcomes of the meetings at AREPO assembly and scientific council meetings, making efforts to activate working groups and synchronise calls. Additionally, as responsible for AKIS in the Veneto Region, Italy, he uses the themes of EU CAP Network events as inspiration for regional- and local-level activities, and deepens his contacts with people he met at the events by organizing cross visits, keeping in touch through e-mail, or exchanging on administrative aspects (e.g. discussing selection criteria at national level).



Giorgio explained that he leaves EU CAP Network events with more knowledge and know-how, less uncertainty, more enthusiasm and curiosity, and more ideas. It is the responsibility of each participant to help build the network, and share ideas and learnings. SolKE members can also play an important role by helping participants before and after events by organising similar local-level events, disseminating calls and event results, and following up with local participants.

Pawel Krzeczunowicz, of the Polish National Network, explained that reporting is only one aspect of following up on EU CAP Network events. Networking opportunities during SolKE meetings can achieve much more than any report or e-mail. Earlier knowledge of the topics of the EU CAP Network annual work programme allows to “replicate” them at the national level, when relevant. Such is the example of the EU CAP Network Workshop “Women-led innovation in agriculture and rural areas” which took place in Krakow, Poland in April 2024. As the topic is also of significance at the national level, the event provided a clearer sense of the possible focus for a similar national-level event. Relevant results and reports from thematic groups and Focus Groups were translated into Polish, while experts involved in these networking activities are invited to participate in events at the national or regional levels when relevant.





Nevertheless, challenges remain. Reaching a broader and more diverse group of stakeholders is a key one. To encourage long-term impact, the preparation of participants is important. They should be aware of their expected contributions, and the planned activities, and they should be ready for co-creation exercises. Following up after the event matters – a lot can be done by more peer-to-peer interaction among the networks.

After these two presentations, there were discussions organised in smaller groups, where SolKE members shared their experiences and ideas on how the results from EU CAP Network activities are being/ could be used at Member State level.

To kick off group discussions, the participants elaborated on what Member States do to promote participation in EU CAP Network events. To disseminate calls for participation and further information about the events, a diversity of channels are being used, including social media, National CAP Network websites and specialised webpages, and newsletters, as well as direct emails. Events are also presented during governance meetings (e.g. AKIS coordination meetings, general assembly) and during events at the national level. To reach specific target groups, communication is tailored to the interests and needs of potential participants. Additionally, some Member States proactively screen forthcoming events to provide appropriate notice and targeted information to these target groups.

Some Member States provide direct financial support, including travel and accommodation vouchers, to encourage participation in the EU CAP Network activities (e.g. Finland).

SolKE members then discussed what could be done at the national and EU levels to increase the recognition of the National CAP Networks and the EU CAP Network to reach more stakeholders. It is important to promote and better communicate the work that the Networks do in order to attract stakeholders such as farmers and advisors. Better strategic coordination is necessary between relevant organisations, including between Managing Authorities, National CAP Networks and the EU CAP Network. Such coordination would help enhance efficiency and avoid duplication of efforts and activities, thereby reducing the risk of overloading target group stakeholders. In this context, actively seeking out relevant, specialist stakeholders could be done through joint meetings, conferences and educational events, and strategic partnerships. Open days for the EU CAP Network are another possibility to promote its activities. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that the timing of events is key, and may be a reason why some stakeholders do not join many events (e.g. farmers).

Connecting regions could facilitate the better dissemination of information. This is a current focus in the Netherlands. Using new communication channels such as podcasts and other mainstream

media can help spread information further. Clear, targeted, and consistent dissemination of information about networking activities and achievements is also necessary. For example, some national authorities seek and target specific stakeholders through common meetings and strategic partnerships.

Other ideas included involving new stakeholders (actors who have not yet participated in any EU CAP Network events), promoting EU CAP Network activities in national agricultural events, and actively involving the media (particularly agricultural journalists) in various activities of the EU CAP Network. Organising awards and celebratory events were also mentioned as positive initiatives in this respect. Sharing participants' testimonies on their experience (during the event and as a result of their participation) was also mentioned as a relevant means to increase the networks' recognition - this can be done either at the national or EU level.

SolKE members also discussed what happens after EU CAP Network events organised by EIP-AGRI Support Facility, and how their results are used. Systematic processes to follow up these activities are not well established across Member States. Reporting back is one way to follow up - these reports are disseminated within organisations, Ministries and among targeted stakeholders. In some cases, event summaries are discussed at meetings and assemblies. For instance, in Austria, national focus groups have been organised on topics from EU CAP Network activities.

In addition, internal and external communication channels are used to share event outcomes, including newsletters, websites, press releases and social media posts. However, the impact of event results can depend on the level of participants' involvement and engagement.

Actions to maximise the impact of the events were discussed, together with ways that the EU CAP Network can support Member States in this. To ensure that a diverse range of stakeholders join EU CAP Network activities (including farmers), the agricultural calendar should be considered when determining the timing of events. Hosting events online can make participation more accessible and cost-effective, and less time-consuming. Targeted and timely communication to inform Member States about the significance and benefits of participating in events is important. Sharing success stories and experiences can help highlight this value.

The EU CAP Network can also provide pre-event and post-event information to broaden participation and enhance the effectiveness of events. Publishing a flash report (one-pager) immediately after the event was mentioned as an idea, to compensate the fact that the publication of events' final reports usually takes several months. Additionally, an idea could be to incentivise social media followers to repost posts from the EU CAP Network (and not just 'like' them).



Session IV: Results from Operational Group projects

Carlotta Valli, COGEA / Bip Group, presented highlights from the 'Study on outcomes achieved by EIP-AGRI Operational Group projects under the CAP' carried out by the EU CAP Network – European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP. There were three main objectives of the study: to assess the outcomes achieved by OG projects during the 2014-2022 period, to identify the main barriers and drivers to achieving EIP-AGRI OG project outcomes, and to compare different approaches to EIP-AGRI calls across Member States. Data was collected through surveys with OGs and innovation stakeholders, as well as through case studies from across the EU Member States.



The study found that 65% of OGs have fully met their objectives. 53% of the survey respondents agreed that OG innovation projects deliver successful outcomes and disseminate innovative solutions. Most OGs collaborate with other entities outside of their partnerships, especially other agricultural and research organisations within their own country/region, to develop cooperation.

A key driver for the successful co-creation of innovative solutions is the composition of OG partnerships to ensure complementary expertise and knowledge, and the inclusion of farmers/foresters and other end-users. Showcasing benefits and reaching out towards end users is key for scaling up and spreading innovations further, especially by choosing the right mixture of dissemination channels, farm demonstrations and peer-to-peer events.

The EIP-AGRI OG calls were considered by 60% of OG respondents to be successful in addressing the concrete needs of practitioners. The calls also had an influence on the composition of OG partnerships. Further simplification and reduction of administrative burdens is important. Less time between the application and the selection of the project, as well as between the project start and the first payment, were named as important possible improvements.

The final Study will be published in the second half of 2024.



Jenny Taylor, Swedish Board of Agriculture, presented the preliminary results of the Swedish Evaluation study of completed EIP-AGRI OG projects. The aim of the study is to analyse completed OGs in terms of successes and failures, and to provide insights on critical success factors. The study is based on a survey of 91 OG lead partners. The collected data is currently being analysed, and its outcomes will help prepare the next programming period in Sweden, as well as give guidance for selection criteria. Innovation is measured at different levels, including project goal achievement, innovation culture, user competitive advantage, and Swedish competitive advantage. The survey measures how much effort went into several aspects, such as understanding the market, using external resources, absorptive capacity, or managing teamwork. The final document will be published in August 2024, in Swedish.

Closing words

Hugo Almeida, Unit D1 "Rural areas and networks", DG AGRI, closed the meeting by thanking all SolKE members for their commitment and engagement. The results from the meeting will be used as a basis for reflection and further actions. The 7th SolKE meeting will take place on 12 November 2024, online.



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