

Leading Generational Renewal in Farming

Thematic Group – 1st meeting on Gen Z

The **first Thematic Group (TG) meeting** encouraged collaboration among TG members focusing on how Gen Z (people born approximately between the mid-to-late 1990s and the early 2010s) could shape the future of farming by addressing both the challenges and opportunities young people face in agriculture and rural areas. This rethink of the generational renewal topic stresses the qualities of the new farmers and the rural context, paving the way for a vibrant and adaptable agricultural landscape. The insights gathered will contribute to the policy discussions at the **second TG meeting**, where the necessary support will need to align with the evolving needs of this new generation of farmers.

Event information

Date: 23 October 2024

Location: EU CAP Network premises, Brussels

Organisers: EU CAP Network

Participants: 38 participants from 19 EU Member States and EU, including students, young farmers, Managing Authorities (MAs), National Networks (NNs), European organisations (NGOs), farmer organisations, national/regional stakeholder organisations, researchers, and the European Commission.

Outcomes: TG members identified future farmers profiles and examined how key trends, such as climate change, technological advancements and consumer trends, will influence their journey.

Web page: https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/events/thematic-group-gen-z-leading-generational-renewal-farming_en


Introduction

Opening the meeting, **Alessia Musumarra (EU CAP Network)** welcomed participants, emphasizing the importance of collaboration and new perspectives. Out of 93 individuals who expressed their interest in the TG, 40 participants from 20 different countries were selected as TG members. The group featured a diversity of backgrounds. Many participants had multiple roles at the same time, such as students, family farm helpers, and workers, which contributed to a wide range of ideas and experiences.

Insights shared by TG members through the expression of interest process were compiled into a “future farmer” profile prototype: a young farmer who is tech-savvy, sustainability-focused and

entrepreneurial, blending modern tools such as AI with traditional practices. According to TG members, the “future farmer” would prioritise community, mental health and a balanced lifestyle, reflecting the values and ambitions of this generation. TG members’ vision for the future farmer extends beyond mere profitability.

Overview of the current CAP policies fostering generational renewal in agriculture

 **Beata Dziechciarz (Unit B3 - DG Agri)** provided an **overview on the current CAP policies** aimed at fostering generational renewal in agriculture. She noted that the ageing farmer population reflects, among others but not only, broader demographic trends. The average EU farmer is 57 years old, male, part-time, and specialised. This profile highlights issues such as gender imbalance and varying barriers across Member States (MS), excluding “one-size-fits-all” solutions.

The CAP Specific Objectives (SOs) related to generational renewal are closely connected to the development of vibrant rural areas. Interventions not directly aimed at young farmers can still promote generational renewal by enhancing the quality of rural life, such as through support for rural infrastructure, services, and economic diversification. Member States are required to outline their strategies in CAP Strategic Plans (CSPs) and ensure alignment with national policies, demonstrating the interplay between various measures.





Mrs. Dziechciarz also underscored the importance of intersectoral policies, including training, advisory services, LEADER initiatives, and efforts to improve rural living standards, as emphasised in the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA). While the CAP provides tools for generational renewal, national policies are crucial to addressing barriers such as access to land and credit.



Looking forward, the European Commission is committed to making generational renewal an even stronger priority, as reflected in the final report of the **Strategic Dialogue on the future of EU agriculture** and the **mission letter** sent by EC President von der Leyen to the new European Commissioner for Agriculture.

Fishbowl discussion: needs & challenges of young and aspiring farmers



TG members engaged in an active group discussion session, which used the fishbowl methodology to ensure all participants had a chance to take the floor and share their views. The discussion focused on the **significant barriers young farmers face**, which include: the **difficulties** faced by **new entrants without a family farming background**, and **lack of access to formal education**, particularly in rural areas that are geographically isolated and/or lack infrastructure and learning opportunities. **Access to credit** is another significant barrier, with high interest rates and collateral requirements making it difficult for young farmers to secure loans. The **reluctance of older farmers to retire** (also due to low pensions) is a major factor preventing younger farmers from acquiring land, despite land mobility services set up in some countries.

Loneliness, especially during the early years of farming, is a common problem. Peer networks are crucial for sharing knowledge, yet the general **decline in intergenerational knowledge transfer** remains an issue. On the other hand, cooperation between farmers can be a way to create more sustainable practices by sharing expertise and resources.

Several TG members spoke from the perspective of small-sized farmers, for whom **profitability and market challenges** are an issue - smaller farms struggle to compete with larger, more mechanised farms. Multifunctional farms incorporating side activities such as agri-tourism are a possible solution for small farms' viability. The group showed great awareness of **gender issues in farming** and the difficulty for women to balance traditional family roles with leadership responsibilities, which often leads to burnout or outmigration/rural depopulation.

Mental health issues among young farmers are at a critical level and come from the overall pressure on the sector, sustaining heavy investments and the difficulty in achieving work-life balance. Participants called for effective policies in areas such as education, credit and sustainability, to ensure that young farmers can thrive.

The discussion ended with a strong call to **make generational renewal a widespread and cross-cutting conversation**, much like the current focus on mental health in farming. Generational renewal must become a normal topic of dialogue at all levels to drive meaningful change and to avoid superficial "youth-washing" (or "tokenism") that merely acknowledges the issue without real action.

Snapshot of the JRC study "Farmers of the future"

Dana Freshley and **Adriana Borsellino (EU CAP Network)** presented key insights from the Joint Research Centre (JRC) foresight study "**Farmers of the Future**" (2020) which identified 14 megatrends influencing the future of farming, and developed 12 diverse profiles of future farmers with different motivations, business models, and technological approaches. These future farmers will play a crucial role in shaping EU agriculture and will need resilience, adaptability and innovation. The study also underlined the necessity for coherent policies to support this diversity, as a varied ecosystem of farms is vital to addressing current challenges.





Interactive session: Envisioning future farmers to drive generational renewal in agriculture



Inspired by the JRC study findings, the following [interactive session](#) engaged TG members in an exploring the future of farming.

The **first round** of discussion focused on discussing challenges and opportunities brought by three **megatrends impacting farmers today and in the future**: climate change, consumer demands, and technological innovation. Participants discussed the impacts and opportunities of these trends and considered how future farmers (including many of the TG members themselves) can best navigate these shifts.

In the **second round**, participants explored **five different farmer profiles** and how these farmers might evolve over the next ten years. Each group considered the motivations, strategies and skills needed for one farmer profile (the Sustainability Pioneer, the Tech-driven Innovator, the Community Farmer, the Urban Innovator and the Multifunctional Female Farmer Leader), essentially writing the story of each future farmer.

At the end of the interactive session, the groups presented the evolution of the five farming profiles to the plenary, drafting their shared vision for the future of agriculture. They highlighted the motivations and strategies that will bring success to each type of farmer over the next decade. Common elements included the importance of diversification, community engagement, and technological integration, with strategies such as crop rotation, agritourism, and leveraging EU funds. Specific skills or needs included work-life balance, climate adaptation, urban farming, and business management. These five future farmer profiles, and the significant traits they shared (particularly shared values) will feed into the rest of the work of the TG.



Next steps and conclusions



Dana Freshley and **Adriana Borsellino (EU CAP Network)** presented the [next steps and resources available](#) on the TG webpage. In concluding remarks, the EU CAP Network team extended a big thank you

to the TG members for their energy and inspiring insights during the meeting, which represented a strong call for everyone to keep pushing for generational renewal and to make a real impact in the world of farming.

All the TG outputs will be accessible on the [EU CAP Network website](#) and inputs from this TG will feed into future work of the EU CAP Network.

