

## Empowering rural women innovators across Europe

GRASS CEILING project establishes living labs for rural women innovators in nine countries and strives for gender equality in rural and agricultural innovation systems

The Horizon Europe GRASS CEILING project seeks to empower rural women and increase the number of women leading socio-ecological innovations in agriculture, the rural economy and rural communities. These innovations aim to find solutions to social challenges while considering the environmental impact. To achieve its goal, the project has established multi-actor living labs in nine countries: Croatia, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Norway, Scotland, Spain, Sweden and the Netherlands.

In each of these countries, the project partners bring together rural women innovators, lab co-leads and academics, connecting practice with research. These living labs provide an opportunity to network, share experiences and acquire the necessary skills for innovation and for achieving the socio-ecological transition. At the same time, each living lab trains between six and eight women on how to lead innovation living labs. With this expertise, the women in the living lab establish a network for sharing knowledge by capturing and publishing innovations and practical experience.

Vesna Jakić is a Croatian entrepreneur who is participating in the project's living lab in Croatia. She produces island souvenirs by processing sheep wool that is often abandoned in the fields of the island of Cres. For Vesna, the project is "a great opportunity to network with innovative Croatian women" and she believes that the biggest benefit of the GRASS CEILING project is "the exchange of knowledge, especially of solutions to the many obstacles we face on a daily basis."

The living labs organise closed coaching sessions with women as well as multi-actor sessions with women and relevant Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) actors. GRASS CEILING will record progress made by these women innovators through in-depth case studies and educate rural entrepreneurs about the type of support they need. The outcomes can be put into practice when working with agri-rural women innovators.

Laura Polo, a Spanish poultry farmer, highlights the importance of GRASS CEILING in providing an important way for the voices of rural women to be heard. She is one of the participants in the Spanish Living Lab and is an initially self-taught entrepreneur who later trained in agriculture and livestock farming to set up her hen farm. Laura says she has met other women in the sector with similar problems, and sharing their experiences helps them to find joint solutions. "We must continue to enhance the visibility of rural women. We are gradually making progress, but there is still much to be done."

Through these living labs, researchers will also analyse the current position of women regarding megatrends in European agriculture and rural areas. This will help them to understand the drivers and enablers for women-led innovations, the barriers encountered and support needed at Member State and EU level.

During 2024 and in 2025, GRASS CEILING is also developing an online forum where women can work on innovations in response to socio-ecological challenges and strengthen the resilience of rural areas. The aim of the forum is to mobilise stakeholders and create a space for engagement between project participants and the broader community.



## Empowering rural women innovators across Europe

### Background information

On 17-18 April 2024, the EU CAP Network for innovation, knowledge and EIP-AGRI organised the [workshop 'Women-led innovations in agriculture and rural areas'](#) in Krakow, Poland. The overall aim of the workshop was to empower women in farming and rural areas by exchanging knowledge, identifying successful initiatives and projects led by female innovators, and by fostering networking opportunities. The final report was published recently.

GRASS CEILING is a Horizon Europe project aiming to boost women-led innovation in farming and rural areas. The project gathers 29 partners across Europe and will continue until December 2025. The approved living labs seek to contribute to a greater understanding of the full contribution of women in rural areas, which supports the goals set by the [Rural Pact Community Group on Women in Rural Areas](#). The community group builds on the work conducted by the Horizon project GRASS CEILING and the [European Policy Forum for women-led innovation](#).

### Project information

#### Project contact

Sally Shortall  
[info@grassceiling.eu](mailto:info@grassceiling.eu)  
+44 (0)191 2086882

#### EU CAP Network contact

Ina Van Hoyer  
Communication manager  
Support Facility 'Innovation & Knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI'  
[ina.vanhoye@eucapnetwork.eu](mailto:ina.vanhoye@eucapnetwork.eu)  
+32 486 90 77 43

[Find out more about GRASS CEILING.](#)

### Project photos:

Click on the pictures to download the high-resolution versions. The pictures are free for use, please mention the copyright.



Copyright GRASS CEILING  
Workshop on the island of Cres



Copyright GRASS CEILING  
Workshop on the island of Cres

## Empowering rural women innovators across Europe



Copyright GRASS CEILING

Laura Pollo: "Thanks to this project, voices of rural women are heard"



Copyright GRASS CEILING

VESNA JAKIC: "It has been a great network opportunity"

Please feel free to use this press article and the pictures in your own publications and to inform your colleagues. If you would like to receive all EU CAP Network press articles directly, please fill in the [subscription form](#).

## More information on women-led innovation

### EU CAP Network 'Innovation & knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI' activities

#### Events

- [EU CAP Network workshop 'Women-led innovations in agriculture and rural areas'](#)

#### Inspirational ideas from the network

- [Promoting gender equality in European agriculture and rural areas \(EU\)](#)
- [Inspirational ideas: European innovation prize for women farmers \(Ireland\)](#)

### Horizon multi-actor projects working on women-led innovation

- [SWIFT](#) Supporting Women-led Innovation in Farming Territories
- [GRASS CEILING](#) Gender Equality in Rural and Agricultural Innovation Systems
- [FLIARA](#) Female-Led Innovation in Agriculture and Rural Areas

### Research needs from practice in women led-innovation

In the EU CAP Network [workshop 'Women-led innovations in agriculture and rural areas'](#), that focused on innovation, knowledge exchange and EIP-AGRI, the participants identified research needs from examples in the field. Find out more in the workshop report.

- **Female farmers face various challenges** such as work-life balance. These issues need to be addressed both at EU and at a national level to advance innovation in rural areas.
- **Societal perceptions and stereotypes** associated with women in farming continue to exist and continue to promote gender biases and discrimination. It is important to create a positive narrative about female farmers in rural areas so that they can be acknowledged for their work in a respected rural and farming community.

In October 2022, the EU CAP Newsletter on innovation, knowledge exchange and EIP-AGRI focused on rural women. This newsletter is available in [English](#) - [French](#) - [German](#) - [Slovak](#) - [Estonian](#)

## Empowering rural women innovators across Europe

### EU CAP Network events focusing on innovation, knowledge exchange and EIP-AGRI July 2024 - June 2025

Find out more details on these events on the [webpage](#).

- **Focus Group:** Production of protein crops under climate change, 20-21 November 2024
- **Focus Group:** Alternative solutions for sustainable livestock product differentiation, 20-21 November 2024
- **Focus Group:** Local perennial plant genetic resources in view of climate change and biodiversity loss, 27-28 November 2024
- **Workshop:** National networking for innovation and knowledge exchange, January 2025
- **Workshop:** Circular bioeconomy - valorisation of forestry by-products and residues, January-March 2025
- **Workshop:** Innovation in logistics to improve the position of farmers in a supply chain, May 2025
- **Seminar:** Robotics and artificial intelligence (AI) in farming and forestry, February 2025
- **Seminar:** Demonstration farms, June 2025
- **Brokerage event:** Horizon Europe project calls, March-April 2025

### The Common Agricultural Policy 2023-2027

Find [information on the common agricultural policy 2023-2027 on the European Commission's website](#).

#### Innovation, knowledge exchange and EIP-AGRI in the EU CAP Network

The European CAP Network 'Support Facility for Innovation & Knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI' acts as a mediator, enhancing communication and cooperation between everyone with a keen interest in innovation and sharing knowledge for sustainable agriculture, forestry and rural areas.

The European Innovation Partnership 'Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability' (EIP-AGRI) was launched in 2013 by the European Commission to promote rapid modernisation of the sectors by efforts to step up innovation. The EIP-AGRI aims to foster innovation in the agricultural and forestry sectors and in rural areas by bringing research and practice closer together - in innovation projects as well as via the European CAP Network and the national CAP Networks. Also, grassroots ideas from farmers are developed into concrete innovative solutions through 'Operational Group' innovation projects. The EIP-AGRI aims to streamline, simplify and better coordinate existing instruments and initiatives, and to complement them with actions where necessary.

#### EIP-AGRI Operational Groups

EIP-AGRI Operational Groups are groups of people who work together in an innovation project. They bring together partners with complementary knowledge. The composition of the group will vary according to the theme and specific objectives of each project. Farmers, advisors, scientists, businesses or other relevant partners work together to find practical solutions for specific problems or opportunities for European farmers and foresters.

Farmers and foresters need to cooperate throughout the project to ensure that the innovative solutions are practical and likely to be quickly applied in the field. Read the [basic principles](#) to learn more. The so-called [innovation support services](#) (including advisors with a focus on innovation), and in particular innovation brokering, can therefore play a crucial role in getting worthwhile projects off the ground by facilitating contacts.

#### Operational Groups funded under Rural Development Programmes 2014 - 2022

- Ninety-eight Rural Development Programmes 2014-2020 (RDPs) provide support to innovative EIP-AGRI Operational Group projects period.
- More than 3,200 Operational Group projects have been notified in the common EU data repository and are currently ongoing (or already finished)\*. Member States will still start more Operational Group projects which may run until 2025 (under current transitional rules for EU Rural Development Programmes). Find information on all of these projects in the [EIP-AGRI project database](#).

#### Operational Groups funded under CAP Strategic Plans 2023 - 2027

Within the common agricultural policy 2023-27 (CAP), EU Member States have designed national CAP Strategic Plans combining funding for income support, rural development, and market measures. All CAP Strategic Plans have been adopted and their implementation started on 1 January 2023.

Twenty-six CAP Strategic Plans include support for innovative EIP-AGRI Operational Groups. In total, 6,600 EIP-AGRI Operational Group projects have been planned.