



European CAP Network Steering Group

3rd meeting - 17 October 2024

Brussels

Welcome and introduction by the Chair (DG AGRI)

The **Chair** (Mario Milouchev, DG AGRI) opened the meeting and welcomed the participants: DG AGRI staff and EU CAP Network support units. Members were reminded that this is the third Steering Group (SG) meeting – the first was on 10 October 2023 and the second took place on 15 May 2024.

The meeting's objectives were to: provide an update of the EU CAP Network activities and other EU initiatives relevant for the network (Long Term Vision for Rural Areas - LTVRA), review the working draft of the EU CAP Network Strategic Framework, discuss priority areas of action for the EU CAP Network in 2025/2026, and to gather key agenda topics for the 3rd EU CAP Network Assembly.

The importance of the Strategic Dialogue report was confirmed by the **Chair**, as a crucial milestone in shaping a new EU agri-food policy that prioritises innovation and competitiveness as key drivers of sustainability. The importance of networking and peer-to-peer learning was emphasised.

President Von der Leyen's recent political guidelines and mission letter has set the future CAP for the next five years, the **Chair** said. Von der Leyen recognises the crucial importance of agriculture and farmers for EU's food security and sovereignty and considers farming as a core part of the European way of life and says that it must always stay that way.



The **Chair** announced to members that the EU CAP Network Annual Work Programme (AWP) for 2024/2025 has been approved, is published on the website, and would be presented in the next session.

Update on EU CAP Network activities

Team leaders of the four support units of the EU CAP Network shared milestones of the current work programme.

Nicolas Esgain (Communication and Logistical Support team) started by reminding members that the EU CAP Network premises are available for National Networks (NN) and other network stakeholders to use as a working space or to hold meetings.

The first edition of an annual communication satisfaction survey was launched and shared with more than 26,000 contacts and received 805 responses. Survey results were generally good, with many satisfaction ratings being compared with industry standards. The website is performing well and performance improved compared to last year, with peaks linked to the EIP-AGRI award and ARIA (Agricultural and Rural Inspiration Award) ceremonies. Generally, if there is a dedicated communication activity, activity on website increases.

The numbers of followers on the EU CAP Network's social media channels is increasing, and their interest and engagement is contributing to content dissemination. The [newsletters](#) are also performing well, with around 27,000 subscribers.

The EU CAP Network Annual Work Programme (AWP) [for 2024/2025](#) is published on the website, which provides stakeholders with an overview of topics and activities that are taking place across the network including implementation, innovation and evaluation.

David Lamb (CAP Implementation Contact Point) updated SG members about three important events that took place since the last SG meeting on 15 May 2024.

The [Young LEADER Forum](#) (YLF) reflected the importance placed by EU CAP Network stakeholders on rural Europe's future generations. YLF was designed to: collect youth perspectives on LEADER – to understand how LEADER implementation could work for them; exchange approaches to increasing the power of young people in LEADER policy making and implementation; and to foster an international young LEADER community.

The agenda, presentations and other relevant material (MIRO board notes of the interactive session) are available on the [event page](#).

The YLF has resulted in increased social media engagement across the EU CAP Network's social media channels, the creation of a WhatsApp chat between participants who are still active, and a LEADER Youth Community by the European LEADER Association for Rural Development (ELARD), that promotes knowledge sharing, support, shared resources and visibility for young people.

The [4th meeting of the Forum on Best Practices in the Agri-Food Supply Chain](#) took place on 9 October in Brussels. The Forum was launched in 2021 with the aim of enhancing cooperation between primary producers, improving their position within the food supply chain and increasing market transparency. Every year, the Forum has increased the number of participants and the trust and relationships fostered among stakeholders.

The [4th National Networks \(NN\)](#) meeting took the form of a Networking Hackathon to develop innovative ideas and solutions to address NN needs. During the day, NNs followed a step by-step process using different methodologies. Seven initiatives were developed, with many including new ways for NN to work together and communicate with one another.

Pacôme Elouna Eyenga (Innovation & knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI Support Facility) presented outcomes from the [Workshop on Promoting pollinator-friendly farming](#), which took place in Slovenia. The workshop aimed to support sustainable agriculture by sharing innovative pollinator-friendly farming practices and systems that promote knowledge exchange and cooperation between different actors in this field. It was attended by 69 participants and included field visits to two operational groups.

Two cross-visits took place in June – one on [Climate adaptation on the ground - innovative solutions to build farm resilience](#), and one on [Use of agricultural and forestry residues for creating alternative sources of income for farmers and foresters](#). New Focus Groups are being prepared on the production of protein crops under climate change, local perennial plant genetic resources in view of climate change and biodiversity loss, and on alternative solutions for livestock product differentiation.

SG members received updates on new videos on the [EU CAP Network's YouTube channel](#) about the EIP-AGRI innovation awards and other past events. A newly published brochure on circular water solutions was also highlighted.



Valdis Kudiņš (European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP) provided the SG with information about the [Good Practice Workshop on Carbon Farming](#) which took place in June. Here where participants exchanged insights on evaluating carbon storage and sequestration, and highlighted the crucial role of CAP measures along with various national and private sector schemes in achieving climate neutrality.

A [Good Practice Workshop on Simplification](#) took place 7-8 November 2024, where preliminary key findings on study on simplifications and administrative burden were discussed.

Several capacity building events are taking place around the quantification of rough estimates of CAP contributions on climate, which includes online basic training with more than 100 participants, plus advanced-level training.

Three ongoing Thematic Working Groups are: [Assessment of sectoral support within the CAP](#), [Assessment of results-based interventions](#), and [Assessment of CAP contributions to sustainable productivity](#). Several recent publications were also briefly mentioned.

During the Q&A session, SG members said that the number of stakeholders engaged through EU CAP Network communication activities could be improved, and the delay in the dissemination of materials after events such as reports could be reduced. Members would like this process to run more smoothly, since event participants must wait for EU CAP Network reports to be published before they can disseminate these results at the national level. Some members also expressed a desire to have fewer but more effective events.

Members also complimented and appreciated the improved youth inclusiveness of the Network.

Antonia Gamez Moreno (DG AGRI) affirmed that it is not only important to increase the number of online followers but also to improve quality. Information needs to be provided in time, both before and after events. Regarding the number of events, there are many topics covered in the AWP which leads to more events, but priorities can be considered in the next AWP. She emphasised that NNs are important multipliers when it comes to events.

Report from the 6th meeting (6 June 2024) of the Subgroup on Innovation and Knowledge Exchange (SolKE)

Magdalena Mach (DG AGRI) gave an update of the 6 June 2024 [Subgroup on Innovation and Knowledge Exchange \(SolKE\)](#). This was the only governance meeting that took place since the last SG meeting.

The objectives of the meeting were to update members on activities, give them the opportunity to know each other better, discuss how the results from EU CAP Network events in the Member States (MS) were used, and to learn about two studies focusing on the results from Operational Group projects.

Updates were provided on Operational Groups (OGs) including a summary of a recent OG conference, upcoming and most recent publications, and on how to use the EU CAP Network website, all encompassed by how the EIP-AGRI relates to the CAP and research policy.

Two presentations focused on the successful use of results from EU CAP Network events, such as reporting on events that inspire national activities, and the translation of results. For example, the report from the [Workshop 'Women-led innovations in agriculture and rural areas'](#) was received as particularly inspiring. Participants agreed that there could be more recognition of the EU CAP Network and that the media should be more present.

Finally, two studies were presented at the SolKE meeting: one on the outcomes achieved by EIP-AGRI Operational Group projects under the CAP, and one on the preliminary outcomes of a Swedish OG evaluation study.

EU CAP Network Strategic Framework

A session on the EU CAP Network Strategic Framework was then facilitated by **Costas Apostolopoulos** from the EU CAP Network's Evaluation Helpdesk. The session consisted of a recap on the purpose of a Strategic Framework and an update on work to date, followed by input from SG members via an interactive session.

The Strategic Framework is a tool which provides a set of indicators used to assess the Network's performance against its objectives. The Framework should show achievements in relation to the CAP's three General Objectives, the seven specific objectives for CAP networking, and the nine networking tasks established by the CAP Strategic Plan (CSP) regulation. The Strategic Framework uses output and results to help assess the successful implementation of such networking actions.



It was noted that progress on the Strategic Framework has been developed during the last SG meeting on 15 May. At this event a discussion was held on the 'factors of success' used to determine what the achievement of networking objectives would look like. In this session, SG members focused the debate on linking factors of success to EU CAP Network activities.

SG members were presented with a set of activities for each factor of success and asked to reflect if the most relevant activities had been linked. SG members requested more clarification about how the EU CAP Network overlaps with other networks such as Horizon Europe, how to improve cooperation with other networks, and how to position the EU CAP Network more broadly.

SG members see the main role of the EU CAP Network as communication, and there should be a specific task for NNs to multiply information. For this, the content must be understandable for end users in rural areas.

Regarding the next steps for the Strategic Framework, SG members will be invited to comment in writing, after which a selection of output and results indicators will be developed over the few weeks with input from and agreement between all the Support Units. A final draft of the Strategic Framework, complete with networking objectives, factors of success, activities, and output and result indicators will be prepared for discussion and validation at the 5 December 2024 Network Assembly.

Annual Work Programme 2025/2026

The proposed upcoming joint AWP for the EU CAP Network for 2025/2026 is in development. In an interactive session, proposals were gathered from SG members for priority areas of action for the upcoming year. The session started with a discussion on the AWP of the Evaluation Helpdesk, which runs from January to January, followed by a discussion on the AWP of the CAP Implementation Contact Point, Innovation & knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI Support Facility and the Communication and Logistical Support team, which runs from July to July.

Valdis Kudiņš (European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP) presented preliminary topics for the Evaluation Helpdesk for the year 2025 and noted that they are still in the brainstorming process. The topics are based on the MS needs and are checked for synergies with the EU CAP Network as a whole.

Topics proposed included assessing: digitisation and innovation, farmers' position in the food chain, environmental impacts and big data, and making a rough estimation of the CAP's contribution to nutrient balance.

SG members complimented the Network for already looking ahead. However, some members noted the lack of discussion and topics of the future CAP. SG members requested that complementary research should be done outside agriculture too, with a focus on rural areas, and also said there should perhaps be more research on regulations and their psychological effects on farmers. A suggestion was made to look at the extent to which regulations interfere with one another.

David Lamb (CAP Implementation Contact Point) facilitated a discussion to gather topics for the AWP 2025/2026, relating to the three General Objectives of the CAP as well as to Cross Cutting activities. SG members were invited to input their priority topics into a Mentimeter poll. Topics proposed included agroecology, housing in rural areas, CAP synergies, implementation of the new delivery model, and social inclusion.

Assembly agenda setting

A group discussion was led by **David Lamb** (CAP Implementation Contact Point) to gather key topics for the 3rd EU CAP Network Assembly on 5 December 2024. He noted that a key task of the SG is to ensure that the Assembly's work is coordinated with that of other relevant expert groups and committees.

Possible Assembly agenda points included updates on the CAP, validation of the EU CAP Network Strategic Framework, reports from the Steering Group and Subgroups, the state of play of the EU CAP Network and priority areas of action for 2025/2026, updates on Assembly members' activities, updates on EU initiatives such as the Long Term Vision for Rural Areas, and an overview of ongoing/upcoming studies on CAP and on CAP strategic plans.

Suggestions for the Assembly by SG members included: to focus on rural development and to link with the [Rural Pact](#) and Long Term Vision for Rural Areas, to keep in mind the broader dimensions of rural areas beyond agriculture and LEADER, for the Assembly to be interactive, to consider ideas for the post 2027 period and for the future from Assembly members, to link the CAP with cohesion policy, and to have a more targeted update from each of the Subgroups.

Participants also proposed that the Strategic Dialogue should be presented at the Assembly in the frame of President Von der Leyen's first 100-day vision, with a focus on recommendations for implementation.

There was a request for Assembly members to have as much detailed information ahead of the meeting as possible, to be able to consult with colleagues in due course.



Responding to Steering Group members' questions

Representatives of the four support units of the EU CAP Network responded to Steering Group members' questions and suggestions raised at the 5 May 2nd Steering Group meeting.

SG members requested more support on the opportunities and challenges for how to make operational groups work transnationally based on LEADER. **Pacôme Elouna Eyenga** (Innovation & knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI Support Facility) said that the LEADER approach is different to that of operational groups, but that the same transnational cooperation principles apply. He recognised the challenge for operational groups to operate across regions, because the CAP is an area-based programme and payments are linked to areas where actions are implemented. However, he noted that cross-visits are organised at the EU CAP Network level, usually around a specific topic.

SG members pointed out that NNs expressed interest in sharing previous evaluations of rural networking and the EU CAP Network publications database hosts examples. **Valdis Kudiņš** (European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP) responded that indeed, evaluations on rural networking exist in the publications database on the EU CAP Network website – you only needed to select the “evaluation” tab and use the key word “networking.”

A request for some analytical work on results-based interventions prompted **Costas Apostolopoulos** (European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP) to indicate that a report from a Thematic Working Group on this topic is being drafted, including analysis and lessons learnt. Work on this could be further expanded with a CAP Implementation Contact Point to see how the interventions are implemented and adopted in MS more effectively.

SG members further suggested that awareness of the [Catalogue of CAP interventions](#) could be achieved through the EU CAP Network's outreach capacity. For **Tommaso Codazzi** (Communication and Logistical Support team), the catalogue and its purpose will be better explained on the website, thanks to a new dedicated page. It could be integrated into one of the upcoming newsletters and shared on social media to increase its visibility. The catalogue can be searched by MS and intervention type.

SG members' request for more detail to understand what is meant by simplification was addressed by **David Lamb** (CAP Implementation Contact Point). He noted that simplification was a topic of the recent Networking Hackathon at the 4th NN meeting in Lithuania. Here it was suggested that simplification is sometimes about CSP implementation and sometimes about the NNs' work. More examples of simplification will be shared at future SG meetings.

David also responded to SG members' request for the Thematic Group on CSP implementation to consider monitoring aspects by stating that this is under consideration. This has been done previously in the Thematic Group focused on Monitoring Committees, and future work will require collaboration between the CAP Implementation Contact Point and the Evaluation Helpdesk.



David also said that the upcoming Farm Sustainability Data Network workshop would include more stakeholder evaluation, in line with SG members' request, adding that this group would be targeted.

SG members suggested that NNs should become more involved in the Rural Pact, and that they should improve their information about the Long Term Vision for Rural Areas on their individual websites. Both requests were responded to by **Marina Rojo de Blas** (DG AGRI). She listed different ways that NNs can become more involved in the Rural Pact such as by joining Good Practice webinars, by joining Rural Pact conferences, by using the database of Good Practices that combine CAP and other EU funding, by joining online clubs for discussions, and by reading publications on topics like holistic rural policy. Finally, she suggested that the country pages on the EU CAP Network website could be further developed to show approaches to rural policy.

Presentation on the Long Term Vision for Rural Areas

Marina Rojo de Blas (DG AGRI) presented to the SG the key achievements regarding the Long Term Vision for Rural areas, and possible ways forward.

A [European Commission \(EC\) report on the implementation of the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas](#), published in March 2024, takes stock of actions carried out to date and a set of reflections on possible orientations for enhanced support action and financing for rural areas, as well as on the ways forward. The first part of the report looks back on 30 months of implementation and maps out the support for rural areas that has taken place. CAP Strategic Plans have offered a flexible legal framework to support rural areas through three main interventions for rural areas beyond farming: investments, cooperation and instillation aid. Around 8% of the total CAP contributes directly to rural areas beyond farming.

The Rural Vision Action Plan is structured around four blocks of actions (stronger rural areas, connected rural areas, resilient rural areas, and prosperous rural areas) which encompass 24 thematic actions and 6 horizontal. Each action will bring different EU policy areas together to deliver on the vision, and on its shared goals.

The launch and development of the Rural Pact has provided a framework for collaboration, and all building blocks are in place.

As of November 2023, there were more than 2350 Rural Pact community members. The Rural Pact amplifies rural voices, enables networking and encourages voluntary commitments.

The second part of the report outlines possible ways forward for the EU rural action plan and the rural pact. It lists ideas on support for rural areas raised by other EU institutions and stakeholders and gives questions for reflection. The EC has committed to further facilitate the Rural Pact, but efforts must be sustained at a national level. MS can use the policy brief "Making the rural pact happen in Member States" for guidance.

When imagining the way forward, the European Commission proposes several questions for reflection. SG members were asked which of these questions might be appropriately addressed at the Assembly. Three of them stood out as perhaps being best addressed by the Assembly: 1) How to enhance financial support for rural areas and communities through EU, national and regional funds, 2) What is needed to improve financing, quality of delivery and effectiveness via e.g. CLLD/LEADER, and 3) What is needed to improve access to support for the final beneficiary.

SG members potential in cohesion funding, and think it is important to have a more integrated approach in future, which could be a topic at the Assembly. Members agree that there must be as much support for the Long Term Vision as possible within the EC, but that sometimes the linkages between the Network and the Long Term Vision are unclear. Members agreed to highlight the Long Term Vision at the national level, especially regarding rural proofing and said they would discuss this at the Assembly.

Steering group members update on their own activities

Members provided a number of updates from their own work that could feed into the work of the EU CAP Network.

The Expert group on the implementation of the CAP Strategic Plan Regulation (GREX) met in July, where quantification of rough estimates on climate change mitigation and the classification of CSP interventions by farming practice were discussed. Results from a consultation on CAP implementation from a regional dimension were presented, along with other simplification studies. A need for more networking in this field was highlighted, to exchange experiences on how to work effectively and efficiently.

The importance of monitoring as well as evaluation was raised, as the EC has laid down the rules for an effective monitoring system, but this does not work smoothly in practice. The system of unit amounts and partial outputs impose a large administrative burden on MS compared to the benefits it brings.

The EU CAP Network could help to promote more in-person and regular online meetings to share experiences and good practices and to facilitate the exchange of ideas for a monitoring system post 2027. Members suggested that a Monitoring Helpdesk could perhaps be set up to carry out these activities in the field of monitoring, similar to the evaluation activities carried out by the Evaluation Helpdesk.

The [European LEADER Association for Rural Development](#) (ELARD) has launched a survey on the implementation of LEADER, comparing previous programming periods. For ELARD, simplification and increased financial support are high on the agenda for advocacy. ELARD, with support of the EU CAP Network, has recently launched a LEADER Youth Community. This is a vibrant and dynamic group focused on empowering young people to take an active role in shaping the future of their rural areas.

The [European Council of Young Farmers](#) (CEJA) has just finalised a project on mental health, for which a training platform is now available and will be shared with advisors. Sharing the training platform with the wider EU CAP Network has also been encouraged, the meeting heard. In March 2025, the 3rd edition of the young farmers leadership programme will take place.

AOB, next steps and closing

The **Chair** thanked SG members for the useful contributions recorded by the meeting and gave information on upcoming EU CAP Network meetings including the 6 November [CSP Subgroup](#), 4 December [ARIA Award Ceremony](#), and 5 December Network [Assembly](#).

