

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

12 November 2024

All presentations and media from the 7<sup>th</sup> SolKE meeting can be found on the meeting's [EU CAP Network webpage](#).

## Welcome and Introduction

The SolKE members were welcomed by **Hugo Almeida, Deputy Head of Unit D1 “Rural areas and networks”, DG AGRI**. He highlighted the appointment of Christophe Hansen as Commissioner for Agriculture and Food, who will have the important task of strengthening the competitiveness, resilience and sustainability of the agricultural sector, while addressing the concerns of rural communities. Additionally, he said the [recommendations](#) from the final report of the Strategic Dialogue on the future of EU agriculture will serve as an important element for elaborating the European vision for agriculture.

Hugo continued with the latest updates since the previous SolKE meeting in June 2024. There are currently 3,764 EIP-AGRI Operational Groups' projects (OGs) registered in the System for Fund Management (SFC). Most of the projects can be found in the [online project database on the EU CAP Network website](#). Hugo requested the support of SolKE members in reminding Member States to report all OGs from the 2014 - 2020 CAP programming period before the end of 2025. In the current CAP programming period, 110 OGs from eight countries have already been notified. Among them, the themes most addressed so far are 'climate change', 'competitiveness and new business models' and 'soil'. OGs from the current programming period are obliged to share a summary of their project plan from the start of their project.

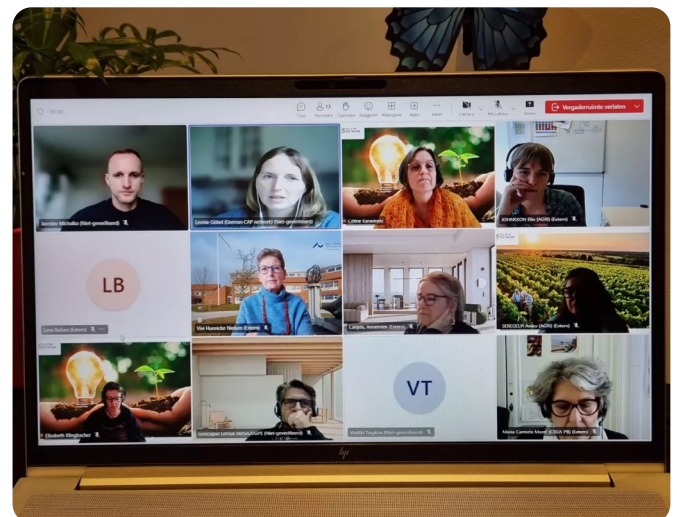
The latest publications were also highlighted. Moreover, as the second edition of the Agricultural and Rural Inspiration Awards (ARIA) was taking place at that time, spotlighting projects involving young people and women in rural areas, SolKE members were invited to vote for their favourite nominated projects.

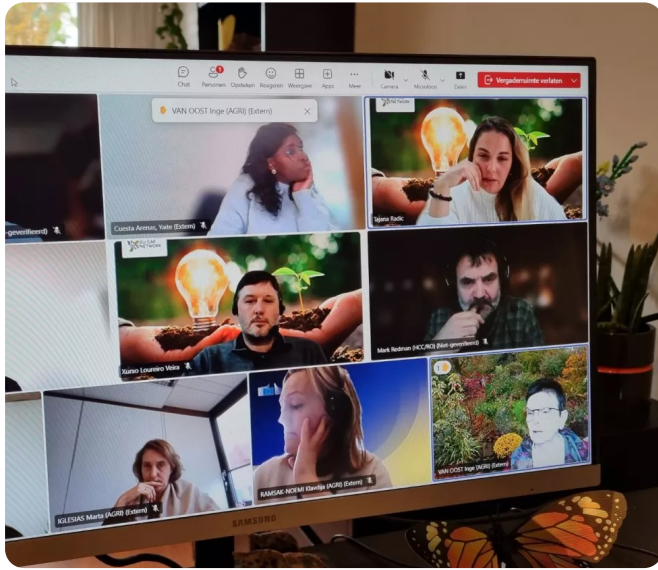
Hugo then detailed the first meetings of the three new EIP-AGRI Focus Groups taking place in November 2024 in Berlin ([Focus Group ‘Production of protein crops under climate change’](#)), Madrid ([Focus Group ‘Local perennial plant genetic resources in view of climate change and biodiversity loss’](#)) and Lisbon ([Focus Group ‘Alternative solutions for livestock product differentiation’](#)). In addition, he noted that the call for expression of interest for participation in the [Seminar on Robotics and Artificial Intelligence in farming and forestry](#) (which will take place on 19-20 February 2025 in Utrecht, the Netherlands), is open until mid-November.

The preparations for the next EIP-AGRI Support Facility Annual Work Programme 2025-2026 have already started. SolKE members will be invited to provide input by submitting their ideas for new networking activities through a survey, which will soon be shared with SolKE members by e-mail. Proposals that are not well developed will not be taken into consideration. In this survey, SolKE members will also be asked to indicate topics they would like to include in upcoming SolKE meetings.

**Orsolya Frizon Somogyi, Deputy Head of ‘Unit F2 - Research and Innovation (R&I)’, DG AGRI**, presented the latest developments in Horizon Europe. She recalled the R&I recommendations of the Strategic Dialogue on the Future of EU Agriculture, and the important role of EIP-AGRI and SolKE to facilitate connection between R&I, end users and intermediaries. She noted the interconnected tools under Horizon Europe and the CAP, such as advisory networks and thematic networks, living labs and lighthouses.

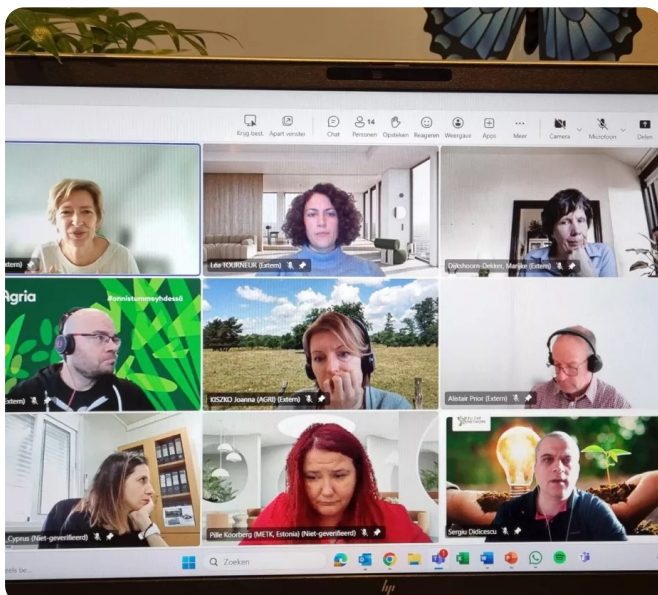
The Horizon Work Programme 2025 is currently being finalised and is expected to be published in Q2 2025. Preparation for the work programme 2026-2027 has just started, and SolKE members are invited to submit ideas. This can be done at the new dedicated session on Research and Innovation during the [EU Agri-Food Days](#). This new event name, given last year to what was called the Outlook Conference, reflects its wider scope. This R&I session will be an opportunity to discuss both CAP and Horizon R&I tools that support innovation in the agriculture and forestry sectors in rural areas.





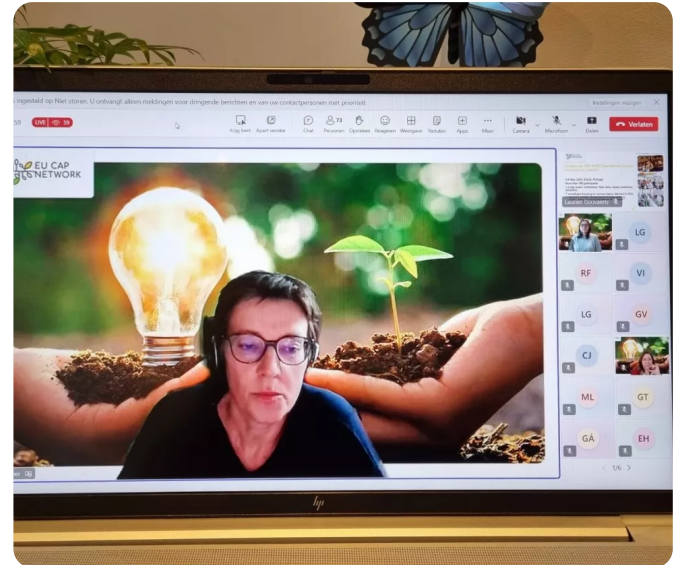
The connection between research and end users is facilitated under Horizon by supporting the multi-actor approach, advisory networks, and thematic networks. Several networks have been launched since the last SolKE meeting (including two new advisory networks and two new thematic networks focused on EIP-AGRI OGs). EU-Farmbook is collecting information from multi-actor Horizon Europe projects and OGs, so there is a recurrent request to feed their results into this platform.

Orsolya gave an update on the 2<sup>nd</sup> [European Mission Soil Week](#), that took place on 12-13 November 2024 in Brussels. During the event, the participants discovered the first 25 Mission Soil living labs and learned about inspiring examples of sustainable soil management. It was also a good opportunity to exchange information, network and to identify collaboration opportunities between participants. Orsolya invited SolKE members to learn more about Mission Soil by visiting the Mission Soil Platform. She also emphasised the opportunity to sign the [Mission Soil Manifesto](#), which had already received 3,100 signatures. Orsolya concluded by highlighting two important events: the [Budapest Soil Health Forum](#), 4 December 2024, and World Soil Day, 5 December 2024.



## Session I: News from SolKE members

In this session, SolKE members were able to share relevant updates and activities aiming at fostering innovation and knowledge exchange from their countries or organisations.



**Germany** published guidelines on how to bring EIP-AGRI to agricultural schools, informing future farmers how they can implement EIP-AGRI and engage with Operational Groups (OGs). The guidelines describe how OGs can visit schools (or vice versa) during 'Innovation Workshops'.

**Agroecology Europe** has developed training sessions on innovative topics and published them on their freely available YouTube channel. This very successful initiative has so far received nearly 14 million views. Additionally, they developed a wiki-knowledge platform, 'Triple Knowledge', to increase the visibility of results obtained by farmers. Through collaboration with students, information on agroecology is further disseminated.

**Finland** recently organised a 'Network to Innovate' webinar, dedicated to trans-national collaboration under EIP-AGRI. Next year, Finland hopes to organise a synchronised call with other Nordic countries. In the meantime, a website is available with all old and new Finnish EIP-AGRI OG projects.

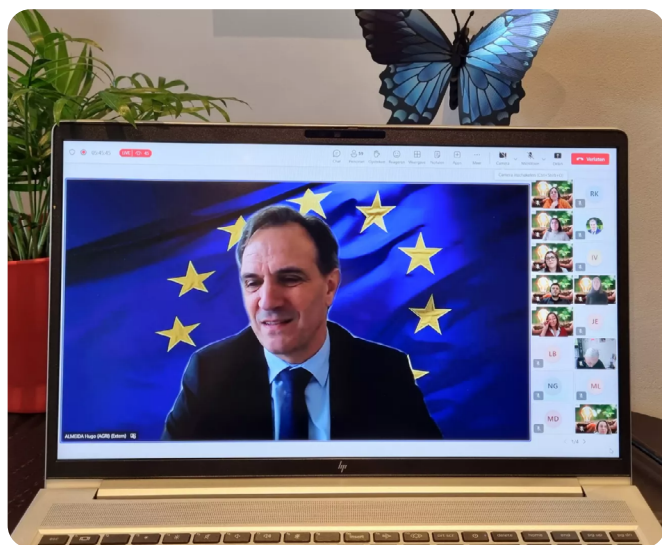
**Austria** organised a transnational event, bringing together representatives of OGs, Horizon Europe and LEADER projects working on soil protection in German-speaking countries. The upcoming event 'Ideaslab' was also highlighted, where stakeholders will be brought together to solve problems related to the agri-food value chain.

**France** released new flyers and a video to promote EIP-AGRI.

**Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS)** implementation is being strengthened in **Italy**. For example, at the beginning of this year, a series of webinars targeting advisors was launched. These webinars aim to promote digital applications, like business management at farm level, water management and irrigation. They are very successful and a good platform to disseminate the results of OGs.

**Poland** organised a summit for Polish OGs. During this event there were several networking sessions focusing on ongoing OGs and on fostering collaboration to launch possible new projects under the next call of interest for participation.

**Ireland** is running an innovation hub to increase the impact of knowledge and to share the innovative results from finished OGs. A survey among these OGs was also organised, aiming to identify barriers, challenges and opportunities they encounter.



## Session II: Examples of follow-up activities on the take-up of EIP-AGRI OGs outcomes

**Regina Menino, EIP-AGRI Operational Group GO Effluents and Living Lab Effluents**, shared insights into the two projects. GO Effluents was set up to solve problems faced in livestock production, bringing together agricultural stakeholders and companies. More specifically, the OG focused on valorising livestock effluents as a resource by recovering energy and nutrients. The project was successful and the results were disseminated broadly. However, it was only implemented on a small scale.

To test at a larger scale and to increase accessibility to the innovation, Living Lab Effluents was launched within the Portuguese Innovation Agenda for Agriculture 2020-2030 'Terra Futura'. The aim of the Living Lab is to adopt a resource valorisation approach, focused on the different interests that converge in the adequate and integrated production and management of effluents. The Living Lab focuses on scale testing of some of the new processes developed by GO Effluents. To organise this Living Lab, the partnership of GO Effluents was extended to include more partners interested in testing the innovation at different scales.

**Victor Carbajal Perelló, 'Nutri-Know' Horizon Thematic Network**, presented '*Activities targeting the uptake of Operational Group projects (OGs) outcomes*'. The Nutri-Know project arose from the need for safe and cost efficient nutrient management, and desire for circular knowledge flows to increase the added value of research projects' findings. The capitalisation process (knowledge sharing, raising awareness, maximising the impact of the obtained outcomes) can support this recirculation of knowledge by combining the outcomes of research projects.

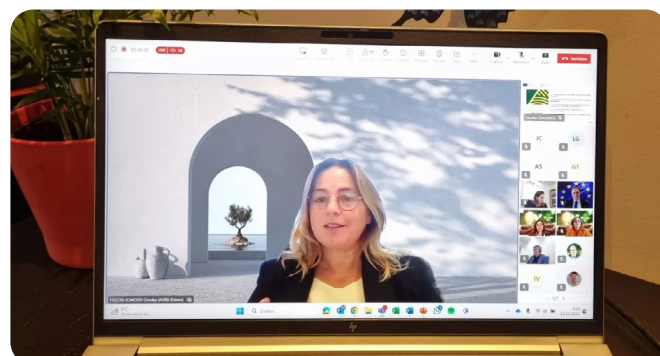
The 'Nutri-Know' thematic network is an example of this process aiming to reduce the gap between the knowledge produced in OGs and its practical application by collecting, translating, and sharing easy-to-understand and practice-oriented information. At the core of this multi-actor project are 12 OGs from Spain, Italy, Ireland and Belgium. The project is a pilot to validate the 'results amplification' capitalisation methodology. Its aim is to engage different actors including farmers, technology providers, NGOs, EU institutions, students and young farmers, and the companies that provide services to farmers.

The activities organised in the project include practical knowledge training for farmers, study visits and exchanges between practitioners, a series of interactive webinars to engage stakeholders in real-time in topics related to nutrient management and the production of practice abstracts. The latter are materials aiming to translate research to practical, actionable insights for practitioners. To do this, the project developed a specific template for practice abstracts and practice-oriented booklets as well as step-by-step guidelines for good practices. The [Nutri-Know communities of practice](#) are another tool of the project which all interested persons can join and contribute to.

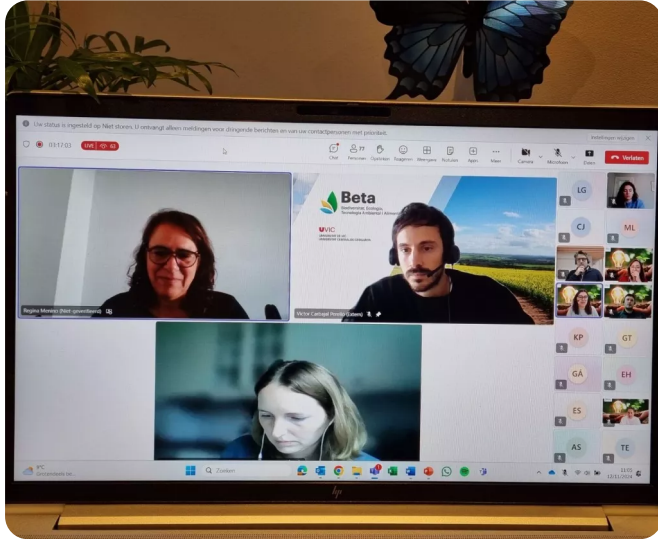
**Leonie Göbel, German National Network**, presented '*German examples of follow-up activities on the take-up of EIP-AGRI OG outcomes*'.

Twelve regions in Germany apply EIP-AGRI with their own Managing Authority and Paying Agency, following their own guidelines. The German National CAP Network has the role of connecting all actors. In October 2024, there were 471 OGs in Germany, out of which 256 have already been concluded. In most regions, innovation brokers have a crucial role in disseminating OG outcomes. The National CAP Network uses different types of actions to foster a lively network where OGs' work is promoted. These include networking activities where different interested actors can engage with OGs (e.g. the annual EIP-AGRI Summer Garden Fest [Festival], in Lower Saxony).

Innovation workshops are also being organised, with the aim of fostering networking among farmers and promoting their possible future involvement in EIP-AGRI. These workshops will soon be organised for agricultural schools. Additionally, the National CAP Network invites (and covers costs for) finished OGs to join events such as agricultural field days. During online thematic exchanges organised by the CAP Network, OGs can meet and introduce their projects and interests. To make OG results publicly accessible, there is a German EIP-AGRI database, the content of which is carefully managed, to guarantee that the shared information is of good quality.



In addition, the National CAP Network gives a monthly update on the projects to the agricultural press and interested stakeholders. This network also produces short practice sheets containing the results of OGs published in the EIP-AGRI database. Meanwhile, the German National Network maintains personal contact with OGs, reminding them of their responsibilities to share their results.



### Session III: Member States' actions in supporting the follow-up of EIP-AGRI OG project outcomes

**Elisabeth Klingbacher, EIP-AGRI Support Facility**, presented the main outcomes from discussions during the workshop 'SHARE', that was organised as part of the EU CAP Network conference 'EIP-AGRI Operational Groups: Innovation in practice'. This workshop focused on sharing results for better uptake by practice, during and beyond the OG project's lifespan. Discussions focused on how to communicate and disseminate OG results, as well as on examples of the uptake of results and on post-project collaboration.

SolKE members then discussed in smaller groups what Member States do with the outcomes of EIP-AGRI OGs after a project is finished. More specifically they considered the support available for the dissemination and uptake of OG outcomes.

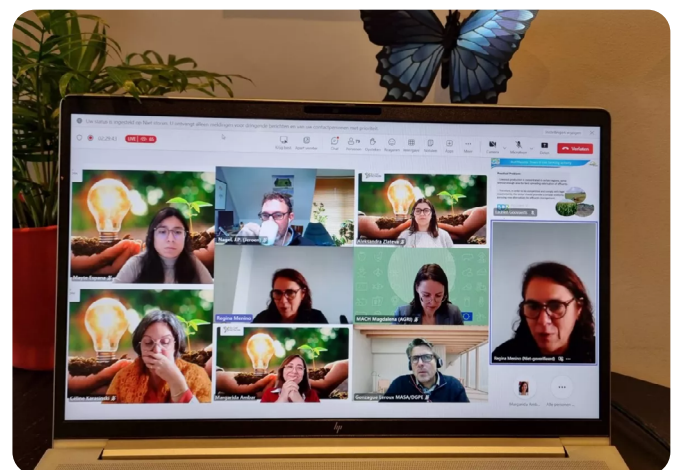
Member States use different online and offline communication channels in disseminating the OG outcomes, including newsletters, magazines, dedicated news webpages and podcasts. National CAP Networks and CAP Managing Authorities organise various events and activities to further disseminate the projects' results. Some countries such as the Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia and France organise annual (or biannual) meetings, national assemblies or summits where OGs are invited and presented to different stakeholders. In Lithuania, the Vytautas Magnus University and the National CAP Network organise annual meetings with an international agricultural exhibition, where OGs are presented to farmers, farmer associations, researchers and other stakeholders. Similarly, the Finnish National CAP Network organises annual Innovation Markets during a major agricultural fair where 25-30 OGs are invited to participate. In addition, the Estonian National CAP Network provided financial support to five Estonian OGs to attend the latest Innovation Market. In regionalised countries like France and Italy, regional events such as innovation shows are also organised.

Many Member States possess digital knowledge hubs and websites dedicated to OGs. These national and regional platforms act as databases containing OG project information, including the project outcomes once they become available. National CAP Networks and regional Managing Authorities follow up with OG projects and collect the necessary information to be uploaded on these online platforms (e.g. in Italy and the Netherlands). CAP authorities in Greece are developing an online map of 360 national OG projects and, in future, OG results will be added to this database.

Cross-visits and field visits are another approach for the dissemination of OG outcomes, as highlighted by Belgium, the Netherlands and Hungary. A cross-visit is planned for November 2024 between Belgium and the Netherlands on the topic of protein crops, where Belgian OG projects will be present. Next year, Belgian OGs will host the same group from the Netherlands. Hungary will organise field visits to OGs selected in the current programming period to promote their work.

Additionally, OGs have the obligation of communicating and disseminating their results embedded in the project selection process. For example, OGs in Flanders, Belgium, are required to include an approach to communicate their results in the project plan. Similarly, in Cyprus, OGs have to propose at least two actions aimed at promoting their results in their project plans. Thirdly, under Estonian regulation, OGs must keep in touch with the National CAP Network and provide updates about their work.

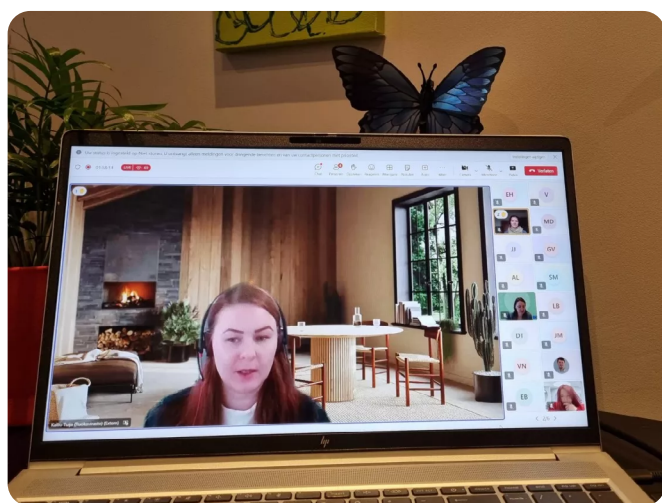
As another innovative approach to disseminate OG results, the Estonian National CAP Network creates videos of the project results and makes these available to other OGs and interested actors. The Finnish National CAP Network contacts social media influencers and collaborates with them to promote the OG outcomes. Two most recent examples of this initiative can be found on YouTube: [Strawberry plant disease control with UVC technology](#) and [Exploring innovation projects - Honeybees as pollinators in greenhouses](#).



Concrete measures were also presented on the uptake of OG outcomes. Finland hosts an [Impact Accelerator programme](#) which supports and encourages OGs to scale up their results. This programme consists of a series of events where funding organisations are also invited to join. Similarly, in Ireland, an [Innovation hub pilot](#) focuses on identifying and mapping scalable innovations developed by OG projects.

However, challenges to adopting these actions remain. For example, it can be difficult to keep in contact with OGs after their projects have finished. Despite the wealth of information available (e.g., through practice abstracts), the challenge remains that some projects have a strong scientific focus. This leads to outcomes which are not directly applicable by practitioners. Support to future OG projects in improving this aspect could be relevant.

In Italy, regional MAs are preparing an analysis of OG results in view of launching back-office activities, as well as to give feedback on the preparation of future calls of interest. Ireland highlighted that to encourage OGs to engage in follow-up activities, funding opportunities and possible follow-up activities should be explained, to support further collaboration and co-creation opportunities.



SolKE members then discussed what more could be done to support the dissemination, follow-up and uptake of EIP-AGRI OG outcomes. Several Member States benefit from newly created AKIS Coordination Bodies/structures, which are already planning actions to support OGs. These include developing knowledge platforms, providing ICT [Information and Communication Technology] tools and supporting networking through information days, demonstration farms and newsletters on OG developments and results.

In Belgium, Wallonia is developing a web platform - 'Walakis' - where every OG will be obliged to publish its outcomes, while Greece plans to complete an online database with results, photos and videos from OGs. After attending the conference and awards ceremony in Estoril, Portugal, Lithuania is considering organising a similar event at a national level.

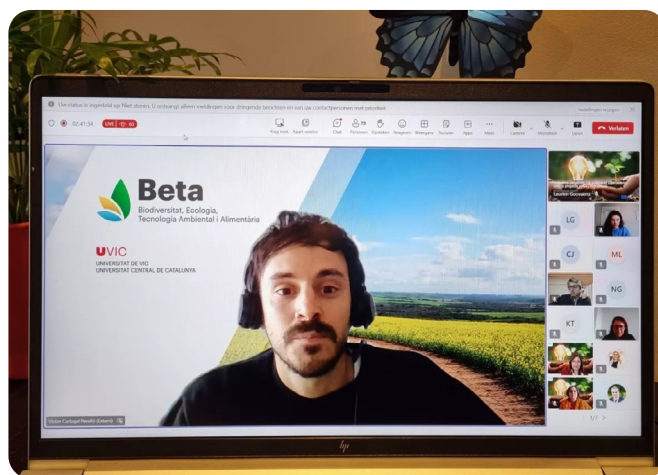
The effective use of practice abstracts is very important as they contain a considerable amount of useful information. However, their quality should be improved, to create more focused, useful, and attractive documents. A good solution could be to support the drafting of practice abstracts or to establish a peer review of these documents, contributing to a standardised quality. To aid the dissemination of practice abstracts, the OG should prepare them in English as well as in their national language.

Operational Groups can be followed up through Horizon projects, more specifically through the Horizon thematic networks. In this way, and in aiming to create a better link between OGs and Horizon partners, Italy is considering cultivating connections at a regional level, where universities could act as linking points, as they are often involved in both types of projects.

SolKE members highlighted the need to design new ways of communication adapted to how farmers learn. In the Netherlands, an action plan is being developed to accelerate knowledge flows based on a study on farmers' preferred learning styles. In Flanders, a webinar series is being planned to communicate OG results to advisors and to inspire these advisers to disseminate the findings to other farmers. To encourage farmers to participate in OGs, Lithuania is assessing ways to allocate 'bonus points' in other CAP interventions to farmers participating in OGs.

France is working on creating a class in agricultural vocational schools, to be held in the coming year, focusing on several nearly concluded OGs. In this context, it will prepare a package presenting the outcomes of different OGs for teachers. The goal is to have a 1-2 hour class dedicated to the outcomes of one or more OGs.

Finland is planning a capacity-building training session on the multi-actor approach. The aim is to explore new methods for working in multi-actor groups, to increase the clarity and efficiency of communication between different types of stakeholders (e.g. researchers and farmers). The plan is to tailor this training to regional workshops (and to train regional facilitators), with the aim of creating higher-quality multi-actor projects, including OGs.



## Next steps and closing

Hugo Almeida, 'Unit D1 - Rural areas and networks' in DG AGRI, thanked SolKE members for their commitment and contributions to the discussions. The next meetings will take place on 11 March 2025 (8<sup>th</sup> SolKE meeting) and on 5 June 2025 (9<sup>th</sup> SolKE meeting).



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