



European CAP Network Assembly

3rd meeting - 5 December 2024

Hotel Renaissance, Brussels

Welcome and introduction

Assembly Chair, Antonia Gámez Moreno (Head of Unit D1, DG AGRI), opened the meeting by expressing her appreciation for the ARIA (Agriculture & Rural Inspiration) 2024 event (held the day before), which was the new European Union (EU) Agriculture Commissioner Christophe Hansen's first public event. She also thanked National Networks (NNs) for identifying project submissions for ARIA2024. After presenting the agenda, the objectives of the day, and relevant technical and administrative information, the Chair opened the floor for the next speaker.

Opening remarks

DG AGRI's Deputy Director General (DDG), Mihail Dumitru, welcomed members of the Assembly, emphasising that they have an important role in raising awareness on the implementation of the policy and in reflecting on its future. He also praised the Network for the very successful ARIA 2024 contest and award ceremony, which enabled the showcasing of several very good projects funded by the CAP. This ceremony also highlighted the importance of giving further visibility to the results delivered by the policy to counter misinformation.

The role of the EU CAP Network's governance bodies in preparing the Network's annual work programme was commended. DDG Dumitru recalled the many challenges faced in 2024, including the natural disasters that hit Europe, the uncertain geopolitical context, and the farmers' protests which led to the adoption of a targeted simplification package which provided Member States and farmers with greater flexibility, particularly in the implementation of the conditionality measures [the interplay between respect for rules to receive aid and the support provided to farmers]. Despite the difficulties, the CAP Strategic Plans appear to be 'on track', while further information on actual progress will be available in the first quarter of 2025.

In 2025, the European Commission will also deliver a report on Green Architecture, addressed to the European Parliament and to the Council. The DDG thanked the CAP Network for the numerous events and activities organised in the past few years and the many more planned for the future that address specific policy implementation issues of interest for the stakeholders.

Some of these, such as social conditionality [where CAP payments are linked to the respect of certain EU social and labour standards] and the protection of carbon rich soils – also emerged among the key themes of the Strategic Dialogue, which provided a basis for the development of the future Vision for Agriculture and Food – a task for the next 100 days of Commissioner Hansen's new mandate.

Towards a Vision for the Future of Agriculture and Food

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle, Director, Strategy and Policy Analysis, DG AGRI presented the discussion on the Vision for the Future of Agriculture and Food. A key milestone in this context was the creation of the European Board on Agriculture and Food (EBAF), a high-level advisory body to the Commission in issues relating to agriculture and food in the coming years. The 30 EBAF members will be high-level representatives of the food chain (including civil society, environment and animal welfare). The EBAF membership will be decided in a transparent and open process, based on a call launched on 5 December 2024, with its first meeting expected at the end of January 2025. Against a backdrop of polarisation in the sector, the Strategic Dialogue brought together all food chain actors and called for a better consistency in the EU policy mix, involving all actors in the food chain (upstream and downstream, not only farmers) and across policy areas (e.g., trade, environment, etc.) for sustainable competitiveness. DG AGRI's Commissioner Hansen is responsible for preparing the Vision by 10 March 2025, and the first step is consulting the EU CAP Network Assembly. In addition to input received from the Strategic Dialogue and from upcoming consultations, the Vision aims to build on input from the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), the Committee of the Regions, Member States, the [Draghi report on competitiveness](#) and the [Niinistö report](#) on Europe's preparedness and resilience. Strengthening the EU's food security and attracting new farmers in the sector are among the key issues to be addressed by the Vision.

Some of the key elements identified in the Strategic Dialogue were mentioned as important starting points, including the profitability of the sector, supporting farmers' income, the need for the market to value farmers' contributions to delivering public goods, generational

renewal, and working with Member States on the generational renewal strategy, looking at factors which keep new entrants from entering the sector. Other aspects mentioned included a new approach to sustainability with a stronger role for bottom-up and voluntary initiatives, developing a new benchmarking system, improved farm data and better access to this data, supported by digital tools for improved awareness of farmers' sustainability performance.

Learning from the experience of the current implementation provides invaluable information for preparing the next CAP, with simplifications for farmers, better targeting of socio-economic support and rewarding farmers who deliver environmental and social performance. Complementary to CAP funding, the budget allocated by the [European Investment Bank](#) (EIB) to support agriculture, the bioeconomy, young farmers and new entrants to the sector was highlighted. In the context of trade – another important element for the Vision – sustainability efforts from the EU's trade partners were highlighted. Livestock farming – an integral part of EU agriculture – and the need to support a reduction of its negative externalities (impacts such as greenhouse gas emissions) and to deliver positive externalities was also underscored. Innovation and knowledge exchange were recognised as essential for improving farmers' access to new alternatives and methods.

During the Q&A session, several queries were raised and addressed. Assembly members asked the Commission to consider the broader context surrounding rural areas and the rural economy, when designing the Vision for Agriculture and Food. Other stakeholders asked to find synergies with the objectives of the existing Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA) and this Vision. **The representative of the EU Federation of Food, Agriculture, and Tourism Trade Unions** highlighted the importance of agricultural workers, of maintaining good working conditions and noted the question of the bargaining power in the context of the sector's difficulties in attracting workers. **The representative of Finland's Ministry of Agriculture** emphasised that there was no agriculture without other rural livelihoods and highlighted the importance of preserving good living standards in rural areas. **The representative of COPA** underlined COPA's support for considering young farmers, highlighted the role of women and female farmers in rural areas, and emphasised the need to consider the LTVRA when developing the Vision for Agriculture and Food. **The European Rural Community Alliance (ERCA)** reminded the Assembly of the LTVRA's importance and that rural development was all-encompassing and covered not only farmers, but also other job opportunities in rural areas, e.g. in culture, health, tourism and services. Other points emphasised were the continued validity of rural proofing [reviewing policies through a rural lens], maintaining momentum with the Rural Pact, the complementary role of Horizon Europe, and the need to build on these aspects 'in tandem' for the purposes of the Vision.

Euromontana welcomed the proposal to integrate the objectives and principles of the LTVRA into the Vision for Agriculture and Food and called for the consideration of mountain areas and extensive

livestock practices in these areas and others with natural constraints [unfavourable conditions such as stoniness]. **Representatives of the Polish Agricultural Advisory Services** acknowledged the process for developing the Vision for Agriculture and Food and reminded all stakeholders involved that this Vision needed to be developed in the context of all other continuing work, highlighting the importance of Smart Villages, the European Innovation Partnership (EIP) Operational Groups and other rural development interventions. The resilience of EU agriculture was noted by the **German Agricultural Research Institute** and by the **Portuguese Member Authority**. Other interventions focused on the importance of considering global markets and trends (including those related to imports of additives, feed, etc.) and on assessing resilience for all levels (from the farm to the EU). According to the **COPA representative**, the added value of benchmarking in the context of the three pillars of sustainability needed to be considered at farm level. In this context, profitability was mentioned as a factor to be considered, not as an average value for the sector, but more at farm level, considering the high prices for farming inputs and the low prices for farming outputs. The **European Council of Young Farmers (CEJA)** said access to land was an important consideration when addressing generational renewal in farming, and the need for improving financial instruments under Pillar II of the CAP. The exchange of and scaling up of good practices, as well as simplification were other important aspects cited by several Assembly members.

DG AGRI representatives reflected on these Assembly member interventions. The importance of the LTVRA, the Rural Pact and mechanisms such as social conditionality related to direct support under the CAP were highlighted. The new benchmarking system being developed must offer added value for farmers, while enabling the measurement of sustainability progress at farm level. While the land market is a national competence, the consensus of all stakeholders, also underlined by the Strategic Dialogue, is that better information is needed at EU level. The planned Land Observatory and exchange of MS good practices on approaches to ease access to land for new entrants to farming and the avoidance of land turning into speculative capital are important in this respect. Reflecting on the role of rural areas, it was confirmed that the LTVRA was being considered in the proposal for a Vision for Agriculture and Food and that the new political guidelines included rural development as one of the main elements of future work for DG AGRI. In this context, the Rural Observatory, the new bioeconomy strategy exploring the potential of biomass and the bioeconomy, and the revision of the forest strategy were mentioned as important developments. DG AGRI also acknowledged and confirmed the important role of Smart Villages and EIP Operational Groups. The composition of EBAF will ensure a good and fair representation of rural areas. The session's concluding message was that the process would continue, and Assembly members were invited to share further reflections relating to the Vision with the Commission in writing.

Updates from the Steering Group and Subgroups

Updates from the Steering Group and Subgroups were presented by members of these governance bodies. **Maria José Murciano (REDR, Spain)** reported from the two Steering Group meetings (May and October 2024) which had taken place since the 2nd EU CAP Network Assembly meeting. The focus of these events had been the development of the EU CAP Network's Strategic Framework for the monitoring and assessment of the contribution of EU CAP Network activities. During these meetings, Steering Group members gave feedback on success factors, as well as on output and result indicators. They also validated the Network's annual workplan and provided recommendations in terms of priority areas for action in 2025-2026. The links between the Network's activities and the LTVRA were also discussed, complemented during the May meeting by a European Broadband Competence Office Network presentation on their actions to accelerate rural connectivity. Referring to ARIA2024 and several projects of importance for the environment and social fabric in rural areas, Ms Murciano took the opportunity to reiterate and further emphasise the need to consider rural areas, including non-agricultural activities and non-agricultural rural stakeholders in the future. **Remco Schreuder (Paying Agency, Netherlands)** reported back from the meetings of the Subgroup on CAP Strategic Plans that had been organised since the last Assembly meeting. Simplification was a focus. The first meeting discussing policy developments (including measures adopted in the simplification package) regarding simplification was based on a DG AGRI presentation, while the second meeting was mainly dedicated to an in-depth presentation of the consultation strategy and to a preliminary impact assessment of the simplification package.

Ireland's **Basic Income Support for Sustainability** clinics and the Finnish National Network's cooperation with the EU CAP Network in organising the Young LEADER Forum were notable examples presented relating to the exchange of best practice. Members of the CAP Strategic Plan (CSP) Subgroup also reflected on lessons learnt in the first year of CSP implementation, on areas for improvement, and on potential topics for the annual workplan of the Network. **Françoise Bonert (Ministry of Agriculture, Viticulture and Rural Development, Luxembourg)** spoke about the March 2024 meeting of the Subgroup on LEADER and Territorial Development (SoLTD). One of the main lessons learnt from the LEADER implementation in the rural development programmes (RDs) 2014-2022 was that different member states were at varying levels of financial implementation (the EU average level of funds used was about 66%), demonstrating that LEADER had not followed a linear performance. This lesson was considered important for planning the next programming period. In the current period, local action group (LAG) selection has been completed in most Member States. The joint mission of making LEADER younger, smarter and simpler for all stakeholders was highlighted. An important milestone here was the organisation of the Young LEADER Forum, where Luxembourg also participated with five young people (one from the Ministry, two from LEADER offices and two politicians involved in LEADER committees). In terms of 'smarter' and 'simpler' LEADER, it was recommended that stakeholders should integrate smart approaches into all strands of LEADER work, and share examples of various approaches to simplification (including the use of simplified cost options).

Turning to the demonstration of LEADER's added value, the new Evaluation Helpdesk guidelines, along with a study completed in Luxembourg to evaluate LEADER's added value were highlighted. It was noted that it was not possible to illustrate all LEADER outcomes with only quantitative indicators. A first concrete result of this latter study was a standardised template to aggregate project-level data for future evaluation at a national level. A standardised template is also being developed for LAGs. Another highlight was the Transnational Corporation project 'Our common future' organised by the Austrian LEADER association, focusing on LEADER's added value, with Luxembourg responsible for the communication aspect (elaborating a strategy to communicate LEADER to different target groups).

The sharing of good practices was highlighted as a useful approach, with good practices and projects presented from Denmark, Slovenia, Estonia, Austria and Finland during the latest LTDSG meeting. **Els Lapage (Agricultural Research Institute, Belgium)** reported from the Subgroup on Innovation and Knowledge Exchange (SolKE) meetings, emphasising the value of shared information and of the importance of using this information at Member State level (for example, some Member States used topics of the EU CAP Network activities to organise national Focus Groups). SolKE members' recent knowledge exchange activities include cross visits between Italy and Belgium-Flanders on advice, administration and simplification. The results achieved by the Operational Groups (OGs), along with the main barriers and solutions had been presented and discussed, concluding that the OGs' composition was essential to their success. SolKE members also expressed the need to improve the uptake of OG outcomes. Examples of this included the Horizon Nutrino project, applying the knowledge circularity approach and the Living Labs in Portugal, both presented in SolKE meetings. Having the right partners and the availability of post-project support for scaling up the outcomes were important success factors. SolKE members had also been updated about the EU FarmBook Platform and requested to feed the OG results into this platform.

EU CAP Network Strategic Framework - validation

Costas Apostolopoulos (EU CAP Network) presented the **EU CAP Network's Strategic Framework**, framed by the networking objectives laid down in the relevant regulation. The Strategic Framework (SF) provides a unified and commonly understood operational framework for the Network Support Units (SU) activities. The SF has been developed in close collaboration with the Commission, the SG members and the Network Support Units, guided by the key principle that the SF is related to one Network supported by different units. The SF is structured by the networking objectives and relevant factors of success and metrics which also enable the demonstration of the SU's specific contribution. When informing the public on funding opportunities, relevant content is collected, analysed and disseminated. For example, the objective on fostering innovation and knowledge exchange is delivered through the main activities relating to collecting research needs from practice; sharing successful innovation and research approaches; and, to creating spaces to support exchanges. The SF includes the relevant activities and their links to the Network objectives.

Some activities possibly contribute to more than one objective (for example, case studies, analytical work, and workshops), while others can be more closely related to a single goal (e.g., the LEADER partner search tool – that is concerned more with stakeholder involvement, the first Network objective). Metrics (output and result indicators) offered by the SF measure the progress towards the Network objectives. Result indicators also include qualitative indicators, including the overall satisfaction rate for publications.

The Chair asked Assembly members if there were any opposing or negative comments, and as there were none, the **SF was declared validated by the EU CAP Network Assembly**.

Update on EU CAP Network activities

The Chair opened the session on EU CAP Network activities by expressing appreciation for the breadth of initiatives carried out by the Network. She praised the Network team for the numerous past events and the exciting plans for the near future. Assembly members were encouraged to regularly check the website and the Annual Work Plan (AWP) to keep informed about opportunities and developments.

The Support Unit team leaders were asked to share the highlights of past and planned events and achievements as part of their **updates on EU CAP Network activities**. **Pacôme Elouna Eyenga, representing the Innovation and Knowledge Exchange Support Facility, including EIP-AGRI**, highlighted the EIP-AGRI Innovation Award held in May in Estoril, using a video presentation showcasing the event's highlights. The award recognised outstanding examples of innovation in agriculture, promoting knowledge exchange and inspiring action across the sector. The importance of such events in fostering cooperation and exchanging best practices among stakeholders was emphasised.

Hannes Wimmer from the Evaluation Helpdesk presented achievements in two main areas: simplification and the CAP's climate contributions. The "Assessment of Simplification of the CAP for beneficiaries and administrations" workshop brought together 91 stakeholders to explore reducing administrative burdens for farmers and assessing results-based interventions with examples from Romania, Germany, and Sweden. An analytical study on simplification was also presented in this workshop. Preliminary results had been shared, with the final publication due in 2025. Secondly, the workshop on "Assessing the contribution of carbon farming to CAP climate objectives" examined the role of carbon farming in meeting CAP climate goals. A review of 55 Member States' evaluations and an analysis of 28 CAP Strategic Plans highlighted the CAP's potential to mitigate climate change. More than 180 stakeholders were trained in using coefficients to calculate the climate mitigation impacts of CAP interventions, equipping Member State actors with practical tools to enhance their assessments. **David Lamb from the CAP Implementation Contact Point** talked about the Young LEADER Forum held in Finland in June, that brought together 193 representatives from 33 countries, generating new ideas and networks.

This event reflected the Network's commitment to engaging with young stakeholders and led to the creation of the Young LEADER community, launched by the European LEADER Association for Rural Development (ELARD). The 4th meeting of the Forum on Best Practices in the Agri-Food Supply Chain provided a platform for exchanging practical solutions and inspiring new approaches, and developed clear policy recommendations aimed at improving trust and integration across the supply chain. **Nicolas Esgain from the Communication Support Unit** presented the results of a survey on the EU CAP Network's activities, addressing both quantitative and qualitative aspects, which demonstrated high satisfaction and engagement rates across the publications, website, newsletters, social media and events. The survey confirmed the Network's effective use of dissemination channels and highlighted opportunities to engage stakeholders further, particularly through LinkedIn and the website, which continues to increase in use.

Highlights for future activities were presented in the second part of the session. For **innovation and knowledge exchange**, a workshop on the circular bioeconomy valorisation of forest by-products will take place in March 2025 in Kouvola, Finland. A series of cross-visits on animal welfare, water management and pollinators is planned for May 2025, with calls for hosting and participation opening in December 2024 and January 2025. **Hannes Wimmer** presented a list of thematic topics for 2025, developed in collaboration with DG AGRI and shaped by Member State priorities. The thematic working groups will focus on assessing digitalisation and innovation, environmental and climate architecture, and farmers' positions in the food value chain. Analytical studies will cover nutrient balance and coherence across CAP interventions, with plans to scope additional topics based on emerging needs. **David Lamb** introduced thematic groups addressing the economic vulnerability of farmers, with a focus on market failures and resilience strategies, and on exploring farmers' broader contribution to rural society, including their social roles within communities. He emphasised the importance of these groups in building a comprehensive understanding of CAP impacts and in developing actionable recommendations. Mr Lamb also highlighted the upcoming Food Farm Sustainability Data Network (FSDN) Workshop, which will explore innovative mechanisms for data assessment and sustainability metrics. Finally, he presented the winners of the ARIA 2024 awards, who received their prizes at the previous evening's ceremony.

During the Q&A session, participants discussed the need for translated documents, faster publication of reports and for alternative dissemination platforms to adapt to the evolving media landscape. **CEJA** praised the Network for its communication activities, which represent a substantial support for their activities and mission and noted the increased participation of young people at events, reflecting the progress in inclusivity. **Nicolas Esgain** and the **Chair** reinforced the importance of effective communication and dissemination, urging stakeholders to act as multipliers of information. Challenges like translation needs and delays in the release of reports were acknowledged, and ongoing efforts to address these issues within budgetary and logistical constraints were explained.

Interactive discussion on strategic orientations for future networking activities facilitated by the EU CAP Network

Assembly members discussed five high priority themes under each CAP General Objective they selected by a Mentimeter vote from a list of themes proposed by the EU CAP Network's governance bodies (Steering Group, Subgroups). The goal of the interactive session was to discuss various aspects of the selected themes and to look at how the EU CAP Network can contribute to work on these issues most effectively in terms of collaborating with National Networks, stakeholder involvement, communication and simplification. Assembly members were also invited to add new priority themes.

Summary of discussions

The group focusing on CAP GO1 (Viable food production) covered risk management, investments and supply chain innovations. Risk management emerged as a critical area requiring a focused approach, with plans to integrate this into the next Thematic Group. Participants emphasised the need for accessible investments, supported by peer-to-peer learning facilitated by NNs. Innovations in the food supply chain were explored, highlighting modern approaches such as digitalisation and cooperative practices. Communication was identified as essential for raising awareness about the CAP's purpose and benefits, with suggestions for impactful campaigns targeting various audiences. Simplification generated significant debate, with discussions centring on practical measures, for example simplified cost options, reduced administrative burden, benchmarking between Member States for harmonised rules and procedures, and streamlined processes at the farm level using data tools. While result-based payments were mentioned as a potential simplification mechanism, opinions on their effectiveness remained divided. Across these topics, the role of NNs in enabling knowledge exchange and supporting innovation was repeatedly emphasised, although there was a call to ensure a balance between specialisation and broad applicability. The theme relating to the position of farmers in the food supply chain was suggested as an additional theme.

The group focusing on CAP GO2 (Sustainable management of natural resources and climate action) explored topics including water resilience, climate change adaptation, risk management, result-based interventions, and the need to reduce administrative burden. Water resilience was highlighted as a localised challenge to be addressed urgently and linked to both quality and quantity issues, requiring tailored approaches at the local level. Risk management discussions focused on addressing the impacts of climate change through financial tools, insurance models and long-term forecasting. Risk management and response to climate events were considered important in the short and long term. The group underlined the need for knowledge exchange and awareness raising in this area. Participants also examined strategies for climate change adaptation, emphasising the importance of data-driven support for introducing new crops and soil management techniques, complemented by networking and exchanges of inventories and databases, and of the relevant approaches.

Discussions on result-based interventions centred on designing approaches which effectively address the risks to farmers while maximising positive outcomes, aided by the networking of advisors, with examples from Ireland shared as good practices. Administrative burdens were flagged as a cross-cutting issue, with participants calling for digital solutions and enhanced national standards to improve CAP delivery. The role of NNs was seen as pivotal in facilitating thematic and geographical collaboration, collecting and sharing good practices, and in working closely with stakeholders, including Horizon Europe, farmer associations, and advisors. The group supplemented the list of priority themes with long-term climate issues (such as glacial melting, loss of agricultural land to flood prevention schemes and eco-service compensation) and innovation and new technologies in farming as new methods to improve resilience.

The group focusing on CAP GO3 (Strengthening the socio-economic fabric of rural areas) delved into topics such as demographic transitions, broader rural development, synergies with other funding mechanisms and socio-economic challenges. The group explored ways to address rural depopulation and to enhance the quality of life in rural areas, including through education, business support, and promotion of the silver economy [the activities, products and services designed to meet the needs of people over 50]. A broader approach to rural development was proposed, with a focus on improving the coordination of different funding streams and sharing good practices. Practical suggestions included inviting other Directorate-Generals in discussions to address overlaps and foster better cooperation. Socio-economic topics were discussed in depth, with an emphasis on viewing rural communities as ecosystems, rather than merely beneficiaries of projects. The group suggested that NN's work with rural ambassadors to collect case studies, conduct research and foster connections across diverse stakeholders was invaluable. Simplification, although less prominent in this group, touched on the importance of long-term funding, climate-oriented tools, and on a clearer EU definition of rural development. Participants also highlighted the need for local events to overcome language barriers and to ensure that grassroots voices are heard and considered in policymaking at all levels, including the EU.

In concluding this session, **Mr Lamb from the CAP Implementation Contact Point** summarised the discussions by identifying common themes across the groups. He noted the shared emphasis on improving communication and stakeholder engagement, simplifying processes to reduce administrative burden, leveraging the strengths of NNs as hubs for knowledge exchange, and on fostering better coordination between CAP and non-CAP funding mechanisms to enhance synergies.



AOB (including updates from members on their activities)

The Chair asked Assembly members for updates and any other business points relating to their future activities. There followed an LTVRA update, referring to the LTVRA report presented in October 2024 to the EU CAP Network's Steering Group (SG). The SG identified three key questions regarding reflections on the LTVRA's next steps:

1. How can financial support for rural areas and communities be enhanced through EU, national and regional funds, including improving their synergies and complementarities?
2. What is needed to improve the financing, quality of delivery and effectiveness through territorial tools such as CLLD/LEADER?
3. What are the best policy tools to ensure institutional, governance and integrated support for rural areas at all levels?

Next steps and closing the meeting

The Chair encouraged Assembly members to provide feedback on these questions. Their contribution to the process of defining the new policies under the new College of Commissioners was considered important. She also announced the dates of future events, namely the Subgroup on LEADER and Territorial Development (5-6 March 2025), the Subgroup on Innovation and Knowledge Exchange (11 March 2025 and 5 June 2025), as well as the Subgroup on CAP Strategic Plans (12 March). All these meetings will be held in Brussels.

In her concluding remarks, the Chair thanked the Assembly members, Support Units and DG AGRI colleagues for their participation and support, and invited Assembly members to share the information received with their stakeholders at 'home'.

