

## An apple a day keeps climate change away

Traditional local apple varieties provide economic and environmental benefits for farmers

**Farmers in Germany's Franconia region are boosting their income while supporting biodiversity and climate resilience by growing and processing traditional apple varieties 30km around Hesselberg Mountain. Since its founding in 2006, the Hesselberger initiative has shown that sustainable farming with underutilised apple varieties can be both eco-friendly and economically viable. Today, more than 1 500 farmers take part in the initiative, collectively processing around 400 metric tons of fruit annually, gaining better market access, and receiving fair prices for their produce.**

Since the 1960s, Franconia has lost nearly 70% of its orchard trees, endangering local biodiversity and traditional farming knowledge. To counter this decline, the Middle Franconia Landscape Conservation Association developed the concept for the Hesselberger fruit beverage brand in 2006. Initially piloted under the LEADER project "Fränkische Moststraße," the initiative is now supported by 34 shareholders, including farmers, orchard owners, restaurateurs, and local officials. Its mission is to establish a sustainable market for local apple varieties while safeguarding the region's cultural and ecological heritage.

"We're harvesting the fruits of our grandparents while planting trees for our grandchildren," says Norbert Metz, representative of the Middle Franconia Landscape Conservation Association. "By preserving traditional apple varieties, we're not only safeguarding biodiversity but also creating new income opportunities for farmers."

Farmers benefit from higher and more stable incomes through reliable payments that exceed standard market rates. Shorter supply chains and direct partnerships with over 170 local retailers and restaurants reduce the initiative's logistical challenges and boost profitability.

Additionally, it provides technical and financial support for orchard maintenance and replanting, helping farmers enhance the health and productivity of their orchards.

Cultivating diverse apple varieties with unique traits strengthens orchard resilience against shifting weather patterns and pests. Preserving traditional orchards supports local ecosystems, helps pollinators, and improves soil health: key elements of sustainable, climate-smart farming. These orchards also act as natural carbon sinks, enhancing the soil's water balance and contributing to long-term climate stability.

Allfra Regionalmarkt Franken GmbH manages the Hesselberger fruit beverage brand and its regional value network, uniting farmers, mayors, orchard owners, horticultural organisations, and independent businesses. By blending traditional knowledge with modern market access and environmental responsibility, farmers are not only securing their livelihoods but also advancing biodiversity-friendly and climate-resilient farming.

## Background information

> [LEADER](#)



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### Project information

Find out more about the [Hesselberger initiative](#).

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### Project photos:

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Harvesting © Norbert Metz allfra GmbH



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Apple juice © Norbert Metz allfra GmbH

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### More information

#### The EU CAP Network promotes Innovations, knowledge exchange and EIP-AGRI in the EU CAP Network

The Support Facility for Innovation and Knowledge exchange including EIP-AGRI is part of the [EU CAP Network](#). It connects diverse stakeholders, including farmers, foresters, advisors, researchers, businesses, and NGOs, to foster robust knowledge flows and accelerate innovation.

The activities of the EU CAP Network align with the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) objectives, including modernising agriculture and rural areas through knowledge exchange, innovation and digitalisation.

By bridging research and practice, the network shares research results, best practices, and innovative solutions with end-users. This approach supports the development of effective Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) across the EU.

#### EIP-AGRI Operational Groups

[EIP-AGRI Operational Groups](#) are small collaborative projects designed to foster grassroots innovation by bringing together partners with complementary expertise. The composition of each group varies based on the project's theme and specific objectives. Farmers, advisors, scientists, businesses and other relevant partners collaborate to develop practical solutions to specific challenges or opportunities faced by European farmers and foresters. The involvement of farmers and foresters throughout the project ensures that the innovative solutions are practical and readily applicable in the field.

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

- A total of 98 Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) from 2014 to 2022 have provided support for innovative EIP-AGRI Operational Group projects.
- 4247\* Operational Group projects have been notified in the common EU data repository, with many currently ongoing or already completed as of May 2023. Member States continue to launch additional Operational Group projects under current transitional rules for EU Rural Development Programmes, with some running until 2025. Information on all of these projects can be found in the [EIP-AGRI project database](#).

\*Last update 8 April 2025

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

Under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) for 2023-2027, the EU Member States have designed national CAP Strategic Plans (CSPs) which combine funding for income support, rural development, and market measures. All CAP Strategic Plans have been adopted, with implementation beginning on 1 January 2023.

A total of 26 CAP Strategic Plans include support for innovative EIP-AGRI Operational Groups. Altogether, 6,600 EIP-AGRI Operational Group projects have been planned.

#### Horizon Europe Multi-actor projects

Multi-actor projects are research and innovation initiatives where diverse stakeholders with complementary expertise - such as researchers, farmers, and local communities - work together to co-create solutions to real-world challenges.

Horizon Europe supports Thematic networks - collaborative platforms where individuals, organisations and Operational Groups share existing knowledge and best practices on a specific theme, presenting them in easily accessible formats for end-users such as farmers, foresters and advisors.

EIP-AGRI Operational Groups projects (EIP-AGRI OGs) are encouraged to take part in Horizon Europe multi-actor projects.



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### EU CAP Network 'Innovation & Knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI' activities focusing on plant genetic resources

#### Focus group

- [Focus Group 'Local perennial plant genetic resources in view of climate change and biodiversity loss'](#)

#### Publications & videos

- [Protecting genetic resources: essential strategies for biodiversity](#)
- [Networking, partnerships and tools to enhance in situ conservation of European plant genetic resources](#)
- [PlantaRes - the Italian Window to Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture?](#)
- [EIP-AGRI Brochure Cooperating for genetic resources](#)

### Operational Groups working on plant genetic resources

[53 Operational Groups](#) working on plant genetic resources are available in the [EIP-AGRI project database](#) (update March 2025)

- Austria (1)
- Croatia (1)
- France (4)
- Germany (3)
- Hungary (1)
- Italy (24)
- Netherlands (3)
- Portugal (1)
- Romania (4)
- Spain (11)

## 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 [EU CAP Network website](#).

#### Recent events:

- **Workshop:** [National networking for innovation and knowledge exchange](#), 29-30 January 2025
- **Seminar:** [Robotics and artificial intelligence \(AI\) in farming and forestry](#), 19-20 February 2025
- **Workshop:** [Circular bioeconomy - valorisation of forestry by-products and residues](#), 26-27 March 2025
- **Focus Group:** [Alternative solutions for sustainable livestock product differentiation](#) - 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting 9-10 April 2025
- **Brokerage event:** [EU CAP Network brokerage event 'Partnering for innovation with impact in agriculture and rural areas'](#), 29-30 April 2025
- **Cross-visits:** [The EU CAP Network is organising three cross-visits between multiple OGs on water management, pollinators and animal welfare](#), From 5 to 9 May 2025

#### Upcoming events:

- **Workshop:** [Innovation in logistics to improve the position of farmers in a supply chain](#), 20-21 May 2025
- **Focus Group:** [Local perennial plant genetic resources in view of climate change and biodiversity loss](#) - 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting 20 -21 May 2025
- **Focus Group:** [Production of protein crops under climate change](#) - 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting, 27-28 May 2025
- **Seminar:** [EU CAP Network Seminar 'On-farm demonstrations for peer-to-peer learning & innovation'](#), 17-18 June 2025

## The common agricultural policy 2023-2027

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