

Valuing Farmers' Wider Contributions to Society

Thematic Group - 2nd meeting

The second meeting of the Thematic Group (TG) enabled members to review the outcomes of the TG work undertaken since the [1st TG meeting](#) held on 26 February 2025. TG members jointly explored what can help improve the public perception of farming and how the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) could contribute towards the better recognition of farming. They also discussed methods contributing to valuing farmers' wider contributions, including storytelling practices and relevant policies supporting the promotion of farmers, and developed actionable proposals on efficient communication about farming, resulting in an improved attractiveness of the farming profession.

The meeting was opened by Elena Schubert from the European Commission, DG AGRI, who provided context for this TG. She pointed out the recently published Vision for Agriculture and Food, which stresses the importance of making the farming profession more attractive, especially to younger generations, as well as the importance of food security in the context of global instability. Better recognition of farming could strengthen both of these aspects, and therefore this TG aims to explore methods for valuing farmers and relevant policy implications.

Reporting key messages from the informal TG exchanges



The 1st informal TG meeting, held online on 26 March 2025, covered the topic 'Strengthening the connections with the society' and was facilitated by TG member **Vitor Rodrigues** from the National Confederation of Agriculture, Portugal. Victor provided an [overview](#) of key points discussed, including the need for an improved understanding of farming and its complexities among the wider public, and the need for a closer connection between farmers and consumers, e.g. through farmers' markets, on-farm tourism, or by engaging young people, in particular from urban areas.

Event Information

Date: 6 May 2025

Location: Brussels, Belgium

Organisers: CAP Implementation Contact Point

Participants: 49 individuals from 18 Member States (MS) and the EU, including farmers and farmers' organisations, European and national non-governmental organisations (NGOs), Managing Authorities (MAs), National Networks (NNs), agricultural education institutions, researchers, agricultural journalists, and the European Commission.

Outcomes: Exchanges on possibilities for improving the public perception of farming through various methods including storytelling or support programmes and initiatives. Developing actionable proposals on how farming can be better promoted.

Web page: https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/events/2nd-meeting-thematic-group-valuing-farmers-wider-contributions-society_en

This relates to a key message: the need for improved farm marketing and visibility to the wider public, with a complex storyline from producers to consumers, and the appropriate funding of such marketing.



Another TG member, **Sebastien Perel** from the European Council of Young Farmers (CEJA), shared [insights](#) from the 2nd informal TG meeting on 'Rebranding farming as an attractive career choice for young generations', held online on 23 April 2025. Sebastien, who also facilitated this interim meeting, summarised the reasons why farming is currently not perceived as attractive by younger generations, and how to make farming more appealing, including better use of social media and explaining what it means to be a farmer, namely an entrepreneur with many skills. He pointed out that it is necessary to implement work-life solutions (i.e. replacement service tools, holiday support, policies supporting pension systems etc.) and actions at the different policy levels, such as the simplification of the definition of an active farmer, or land provision and farm access programmes. Despite significant differences across Europe, addressing the access to land, finance and knowledge/skills seems to be the common action needed for attracting younger generations into farming.



Inspirations for an improved image and attractiveness of farming

In the following session, TG members and a guest speaker delivered inspiring presentations on how farming could be better promoted, including through storytelling and by using CAP support.

Howard Koster, a Dutch farmer, **presented** his farm **de Biesterhof**, a land cooperative focused on increasing biodiversity. The cooperative bought a former conventional dairy farm in 2022, and since then has been producing food, mainly for human consumption. The market garden is the beating heart of the farm; the place they receive visitors and customers for farm visits or direct sales. Visitors also help plant crops and volunteer to increase on-farm biodiversity, or join farm lunches for which the chefs cook with products from the farm. With the motto 'your health grows in my farm!', their 'gold thread' is that farmers need to become better storytellers. The farm organises open days and study visits, available also for international groups. The cooperative is benefitting from CAP support for demonstration farms delivering agricultural advice and education. In that respect, their main target groups are farmers, farming students and farm advisors. A research agency is helping them find ways to attract more young people to the farm.



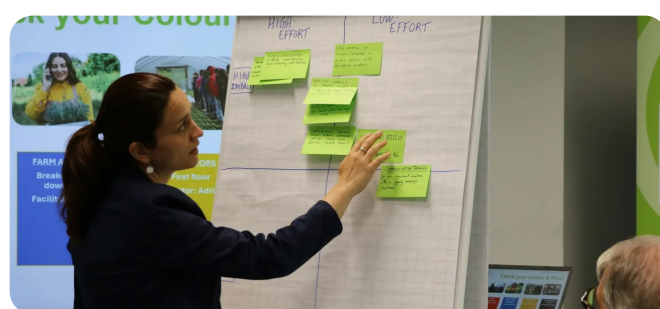
Paul Daniëls, representing the Association of Rural and Farm Advisors (VAB) from the Netherlands, **showcased** an innovative participatory concept of direct involvement of people into farming. **'Herenboren'** – a citizen farmers' initiative – brings together people who want to get involved in farming and know more professional farmers are hired to run the farm, while the citizens assist them with on-farm duties. The harvest is collectively shared. So far, 22 operational farms and 8 start-ups have been set up in the Netherlands and the aim is to involve up to 250 households per farm. The main added value of this approach is an increasing awareness about farming – citizens engaged in the process have "changed forever" as now they know how much effort goes into producing food.

Peter Dewitte from the **Flemish National Network (NN)**, Belgium, **presented** an inspiring example of CAP-funded communication activities linked to farming.

The Network is producing thematic brochures to communicate CAP measures, as well as featuring interviews with farmers and researchers. The brochures provide enough space to explain farming issues and challenge realities, but also highlight their broader value for society (e.g. water management). The Network is also proactive in direct public interaction – they bring farmers closer to the public through a market in Leuven during Europe Day, and this year created a campaign 'Radio on campus', together with communication students. The aim is to have influencers who will interview project representatives (including projects on farming) on college campuses. The Network also annually organises the social media campaign 'Europe is closer than you think'.

Hannelore Akkermans, an invited expert on storytelling and a farmer herself, **shared** her own story. Being involved in **Volle grond** – a community rooftop in Antwerp, Belgium – and being responsible for marketing and public relations, she highlighted several lessons linked to farmer storytelling. Visitors are naturally curious about farmers and their life journey. A farmer's story has to be personal, relatable and human; but also transparent, constructive and meaningful, and at the same time preferably also educational, visual and hopeful. Avoiding 'toxic positivity,' i.e. pretending that everything is always good all the time, should be replaced by truth and authenticity. Storytelling can be adapted to different audiences, but also to different farms. The image of a 'farmer' generated by an AI is very different from real-life farmers, in terms of gender and age, but also digital skills and education. Storytelling can help change the narrative and give the media a different story to tell. As she pointed out - through storytelling, 'the vegetables now have a face' and it is important to communicate that 'the future is farmed, not just built!'

The subsequent discussion pointed out that farmers should be storytellers themselves, but first and foremost they need to be occupied with farming. Therefore, not enough time may be left for storytelling, and it is very helpful if there is a dedicated person or community with sufficient time and skills to engage with public.





TG members also flagged that financial support for farmers' marketing and relevant training on communication is necessary to enable conditions that allow farmers to tell their story to the public. Farm marketing and capacity building on how to communicate with the public should be given financial support from public funds, including the CAP.



Interactive session on how to communicate about farming

Members were split into five parallel teams to discuss what would be the most efficient way to communicate about farming from the perspective of different stakeholders. Using a participatory method, the aim was to jointly develop actionable proposals, while each team presented one selected proposal in the final competition.

1. Farmers

The proposal from the farmers' team is linked to organising an EU farmers' day. This recurrent annual occasion would feature an open farm day, inspired and already very well developed in [Estonia](#). The entire campaign would be implemented in cooperation with individual farmers hosting visitors, with a national coordination body, i.e. national farmers' organisations or an appointed public institution, but also involving EU-level institutions. The organisers would create a communication guide for quality assurance and better coordination and guidelines, including an EU-wide promotion, through short videos displayed in public spaces in the cities. This would unite European farmers, connect producers and consumers, and demonstrate the skills and knowledge of farmers, as well as raise awareness about farming among citizens.

2. Journalists

The team representing journalists proposed national regular multimedia coverage putting farmers at the centre, presenting farming as a career and, as such, based on three pillars: technical knowledge, economic viability, and social impact. The media coverage should be based on a full multimedia strategy: it should be recurrent and carried out in partnership with a range of media and networks by professional agri-journalists, and with an editorial and redactional charter. The strategy should make use of a trusted database of authentic farmer voices to be interviewed for all sorts of issues and topics. The multimedia coverage would use campaigns for different target groups, including social media campaigns targeting young people.

3. Farm Advisors

This team's proposal was around 'showing your true value' and looked at a staged approach, including farming on the curriculum and raising awareness of farming activities. The basis of this was trying to take innovative approaches (including guerilla marketing) to involve the general public. The final component was enabling a 'farming week' during which greater focus could be placed on farming activities, lifestyles, and the long-term benefits and traditions of rural society. This would be supplemented by using modern, public-oriented technologies or platforms, and involving rural or young farm ambassadors. Highlighting the role of farm advisors and involving them was a key component.

4. Educators

The team proposed the development of a fictional TV series titled 'Seasons Change', aimed at reshaping public perception of farming and elevating the image of farmers in society. Through emotionally engaging storytelling, each episode would explore the diversity of farming systems, highlight the advanced skills and technologies involved, and challenge persistent stereotypes. By blending realism with fiction, the series would foster greater appreciation for farmers, instil a sense of pride within the farming community, and could serve as an educational tool to teach younger generations about farming, establishing a passion in them from an early age.





5. Public administrators

This team developed a proposal with a holistic strategy aimed at making farming more attractive, particularly to young people. The strategy is called 'F.A.C.E. for farmers', and focuses on four key areas: Farmers' social security, Access to land, Communication and recognition and Education (FACE)'. These four components are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. The outcomes of this strategy would be: (1) improved social security for farmers, including relief services and support for work-life balance (inspired by good examples already implemented in Estonia, Austria and Finland); (2) fewer barriers to becoming a farmer. Individuals with necessary skill sets and motivation could access agricultural land and participate in farming-related initiatives more easily; (3) positive communication about farming. Farming would be recognised as a valuable profession and viable career path. Further, food would be more valued when seen not just as a commodity but as essential to health and well-being; (4) integration into education. Agrifood topics would become part of the compulsory education curriculum at primary and secondary school.

The winning proposal, selected in an open vote by all TG members, was the one presented by the public administrators' team.



Next Steps

At the end of the meeting, participants were provided with an overview of the Thematic Group's forthcoming outputs and forthcoming relevant EU CAP Network activities.