



European CAP Network Steering Group

4th Meeting - 14 May 2025

Avenue des Arts 9, 1210, Brussels

Welcome and introduction by the Chair (DG AGRI)

The **Chair** (Mario Milouchev, DG AGRI) opened the meeting and welcomed Steering Group (SG) members, DG AGRI staff and EU CAP Network support units. SG members were reminded that this was the fourth SG meeting – the first meeting was on 10 October 2023, the second on 15 May 2024 and the third on 17 October 2024.

The meeting's objectives were to: update SG members on the EU CAP Network activities, National Network activities, and the [Vision for Agriculture and Food](#), present the outcomes of the Assembly and Subgroups meetings, discuss the outline of the EU CAP Network Annual work programme for 2025/2026, and discuss processes for Annual Work Programme (AWP) design.

The **Chair** gave a brief update on the Vision for Agriculture and Food which reflects a commitment to ensuring that farming and food remain strategic sectors for Europe. He also announced that the [2nd simplification package](#) was published that very day (14 May 2025), including proposals to simplify risk management and actions to reduce the burden of farmers and national administrations.

The **Chair** outlined that proposals for the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) emphasised the need for a simpler CAP, and that the public consultation on this recently closed. He iterated that dialogue was central to shaping future policies, and engaging with relevant stakeholders through the EU CAP Network was key to building a common policy.

Update on the Vision for Agriculture and Food

Pasquale Di Rubbo, DG AGRI, gave a further update on the [Vision for Agriculture and Food](#), including some of the outcomes of the Conference on the Vision for Agriculture and Food organised by the European Commission on 8 May 2025. He also informed participants that a dedicated workstream on livestock had been launched in the framework of the Vision to specifically address the long-term viability of livestock farming and supporting farmers in the sustainability transition. He explained the rationale behind the Vision and the bottom-up approach promoted by the Commission to work on its follow-up implementation. In this respect, further inputs from stakeholders were expected.

Pasquale also talked further about the 2nd simplification package, which was the result of a huge effort to identify further areas for simplification within the CAP. The estimated savings will be EUR 1.5 billion for farmers and EUR 200 million for Member States (MS). The 3rd simplification package plans to look beyond the CAP to involve other Commission services such as DG SANTE, DG CLIMA and DG ENV to tackle issues of pesticides, fertilisers, and veterinary medicine.

Clarifying the different initiatives at European level, he explained that the [European Board on Agriculture and Food \(EBAF\)](#) was established as a follow-up to the Strategic Dialogue and is composed of 30 stakeholders who provide strategic steering on agriculture and food. They currently address two main questions: 1) how to better target direct payments in specific sectors, and 2) how to best move from conditions to incentives. The use of conditionality as a tool is very effective in keeping ambition, but after internal reflection within DG AGRI, it must become simplified and more context specific. It is key to provide targeted income support, but payments for ecosystem services should be open for all farmers.

Work on the MFF and the CAP proposal for the period post-2027 is advancing rapidly, with plans to publish both proposals in mid-July. He assured SG members that the CAP will continue to play an important role in supporting the farming sector and rural areas.

Pasquale also mentioned other initiatives, such as the European Land Observatory, which will enhance transparency and cooperation in domains such as land transactions and access to land, price trends, and changes in land use, as well as loss of agricultural and natural land. Generational renewal to build an attractive farming sector of the future and water resilience are pertinent topics addressed at European level. Both initiatives will include actions beyond the CAP.



During Q&A, SG members voiced that more synergies could be made with DG REGIO to partner on food-related issues, including the [Long Term Vision for Rural Areas](#) and the Vision on Agriculture and Food. SG members asked for clarification on the role of National Networks to feed into the Vision, as it is currently unclear how elements of rural development will be included. They emphasised that rural areas play an important role, and that LEADER and cooperation are important for rural and farming communities. According to SG members, it will be important, in the wake of budget cuts, to preserve the integrity of the CAP toolbox.

In response, **Pasquale** affirmed that the new CAP will be significantly streamlined, with simpler rules giving more flexibility and responsibility to MS. Practices will need to be decided at the national level. DG AGRI is currently looking into how the two types of instruments, conditions, and incentives can work better in terms of more flexibility for MS, and they are also looking into annual versus multi-annual commitments.

A question on how the [Nature Restoration Law \(NRL\)](#) will be linked to the Vision was raised, and **Pasquale** affirmed that the NRL will be a key legislation and that eco-schemes can play an important role in reaching its objectives. Currently the CAP provides the possibility to have payments for activities relating to the EU's Water Framework Directive and Natura2000, but reflections are ongoing on whether the current list needs to be expanded (e.g. NRL).

A final question on how the Vision will support those in need, for example areas that are affected by climate change, was answered by a commitment to better targeting. Some areas will deserve special attention, particularly those with natural constraints.



Presentation on the organisational structures and activities of the National Networks

Eirini Litina, EU CAP Network, gave a presentation on the organisational structures and activities of the [National Networks \(NNs\)](#). There are three types of actors involved in NN structures; 1) National Networks, which are platforms established by each MS to support the effective implementation of the CAP through collaboration, knowledge exchange, stakeholder engagement and networking, 2) Network Support Units (NSU), which are the operational bodies that support the functioning of the NNs, and 3) Managing Authorities (MA), which are the official bodies designated by the MS to oversee the design and implementation of the CAP Strategic Plans.

An online survey for the NNs was conducted in January 2025, containing questions about organisational structures, regional structures and NN membership, to which all 28 NNs responded. Most NNs are established within the MA, with the second common structure being the NN delegated to a ministerial agency or other institution. Only three NNs are fully outsourced to an external provider. Detail was also provided on changes in structure, number of employees, regional organisation and types of membership.

Eirini concluded her presentation by giving some updates on NN activities. There are four ongoing geographical clusters: the Mediterranean, Atlantic, Central-Eastern European, and Nordic-Baltic, who meet regularly online and sometimes in person to share updates, news and networking activities. There are five ongoing thematic clusters: Communication, Rural youth, Green architecture & eco-schemes, CAP evaluation & monitoring, and Regional antennas, who also meet regularly.

All the NNs meet twice a year at NN meetings that take place in different countries each time and are co-hosted by the NNs. The 6th NN meeting will take place on 1-2 October 2025 in Bulgaria. The latest edition of the [Agricultural and Rural Inspiration Awards \(ARIA\)](#) has just been launched for 2025, with the main topic this year being generational renewal.

During Q&A, SG members wondered if LEADER Transnational Cooperation (TNC) and the work of EIP-AGRI Operational Group projects (OG) are included in the networking activities. Geographical clusters support LEADER TNC through peer-to-peer exchange; however, it was clarified by DG AGRI that there is a distinction between LEADER TNC, the work of the OGs, and networking activities.

Outline of the EU CAP Network AWP 2025/2026

The four team leaders or deputy team leaders of the EU CAP Network support units, **David Lamb**, **Sergiu Didicescu**, **Hannes Wimmer**, and **Nicolas Esgain**, presented an outline of the EU CAP Network Annual Work Programme (AWP) 2025/2026. The work programme showed which topics are proposed, relating to the three General Objectives of the CAP as well as Cross-Cutting activities.

Interactive session on the AWP 2025/2026

A facilitated discussion took place with the SG members for the purpose of validating the proposed AWP topics and linking to SG member activities, by General Objective and Cross-Cutting activities.

In general, SG members agreed that the AWP topics are in line with stakeholder priorities, and that was much appreciated. Regarding GO 1 (Viable food production), there were suggestions from SG members to include the farmers' perspective, considering their need for fair incomes and stability; for example, resilience and climate change mitigation could be addressed from a GO1 perspective, instead of only within GO2. External trade, food security, knowledge transfer, innovation, and Artificial Intelligence were topics emphasised by SG members that should be included. It was also suggested that the topics of remote sensing and data could be extended to include how they can be used to reduce administrative burden.

The importance of better strengthening research and practice through demonstrations was emphasised, which can also be a cross-cutting topic.



Regarding G02 (Sustainable management of natural resources and climate action), SG members encouraged the inclusion of synergies between different GOs. For example, improving water resilience in rural areas could include aspects on rural communities, Smart Villages, and critical infrastructure. On the topic of sustainable livestock systems, it was suggested to include pastoralism and digital innovation in livestock systems.

Regarding G03 (Balanced territorial development), SG members wondered if the topic of Simplified Cost Options (SCOs) would relate to specific interventions, by which it was clarified that the starting point would be quite open, but would take inspiration from approaches used in LEADER. Members suggested that the topic of LEADER should include the role of LEADER and multi-funded CLLD in strengthening social resilience and local democracy, and how LEADER is managed in different MS. It was mentioned that the synergies between agriculture and cohesion should be maintained. The importance and added value of TNC should continue to be highlighted, for example through the new [LAG Directory](#) on the EU CAP Network website.

In response to a question on cross-cutting activities, SG members were informed of activities such as networking and networking mapping covering a range of topic areas. Synergy between EU CAP Network support units was also explained. Regarding the topics, members agreed that generational renewal must remain quite a large theme to ensure quality of life in rural areas. Within the topic of generational renewal, social aspects are important to consider. On the topic of knowledge hubs, it was mentioned that networking between MAs will be important when identifying opportunities for knowledge exchange and to make sure that the right people are addressed.

Members were then asked to share any activities that have been completed by their own organisations that could feed into the AWP topics proposed and enrich the work of the Network.

Many activities were shared by SG members regarding the topic of water resilience, including a policy paper on water resilience from the Conseil des Communes et Régions d'Europe (CCRE), a research study on water resilience and opportunities from the Spanish Network, a position paper on water resilience from Euromontana, and a Water Protection Operational Group in the Hungarian Ministry of Agriculture.

On the topic of SCOs, the European LEADER Association for Rural Development (ELARD) is planning to update its 2019 good practice report, and CREA has finished developing the SCO methodology for OGs and advisory service providers. On the topic of LEADER TNC, ELARD ran an EU-wide survey on implementation and topical priorities of LAGs for this programming period, and the Finnish Network currently has a CLLD working group.

On the topic of generational renewal, ELARD will organise the 2026 LAG Congress on the role of local development strategies in encouraging young people to stay in rural areas, and the Finnish Network has built a small section on their website that highlights generational renewal issues.

Interactive session on discussing process for AWP design

An interactive session was held with SG members to co-develop and validate the roadmap for the Annual Work Programme (AWP).

After a brief introduction, members were presented with a large, printed roadmap outlining the six key steps for the AWP process: Preliminary Input, Screening & Preparation, Strategic Consultation, Thematic Scoping, Alignment & Drafting, and Presentation & Validation. The session aimed to validate the overall process, define appropriate methods for gathering input, confirm or refine actor responsibilities, and ensure a shared understanding of the outcomes expected at each stage. Members discussed each step in turn, guided by EU CAP Network facilitators, and were also invited to propose intermediate steps where needed.

For the **Preliminary input phase**, members proposed an online survey that could be tailored for GOs and support units, and would include a clear rationale for the suggested strategic priorities. It was suggested that the EU CAP Network support units collect and coordinate inputs from Assembly member submissions. A second survey round could then help prioritise topics. An intermediate step was proposed, involving a light screening of survey results by the three Subgroups before formal clustering.

In the **Screening & Preparation phase**, the Steering Group will cluster the collected strategic priorities during its autumn meeting, considering the policy and political context, to provide perspective. During **Strategic Consultation**, it was agreed that Assembly members should receive thematic areas in advance, and that discussions should be structured around thematic clusters instead of the delivery of the EU CAP Network support units.

Thematic Scoping will follow in February and March, involving Subgroup members to further refine topics.

In **Alignment & Drafting**, the support units will work with DG AGRI Units to align selected topics with broader policy goals. Finally, **Presentation & Validation** should include clear feedback on how topics were selected and rejected, with early sharing of topic descriptions to ensure transparency and coherence.

Key takeaways included the need for greater methodological consistency, transparency, dissemination and synergies across steps. SG members were reminded that the [current AWP and previous AWPs](#) are available on the EU CAP Network website.

Subgroups and Assembly reports

The update on [the Subgroup on Innovation and Knowledge Exchange \(SolKE\)](#) – was provided by **Mark Redman** (Euromontana), reporting on previous SolKE meetings and highlighting the constructive networking that this group facilitates. Topics covered during the last SolKE meeting included updates from both DG AGRI and SolKE members, which is a regular agenda item. This was noted as being useful for helping to permit two-way dialogue between national and EU stakeholders. The meeting also included contribution to the AWP development, which is working smoothly. A presentation was given by DG AGRI on urban farming, followed by a field visit.

An update from the Subgroup on [CAP Strategic Plans \(SoCSP\)](#) by **Christian Gaebel** (Copa Cogeca) noted the strong member participation during the meetings, but the need for more Managing Authority and Paying Agency participation was raised, as this input is important when talking about practical implementation. At the last SoCSP meeting, DG AGRI gave an update on the Strategic Dialogue and the Vision, and the future MFF. An update was given on the EU CAP Network Strategic Framework, which serves as a basis for monitoring and assessing the contribution of the activities of the EU CAP Network against its networking objectives, as established by CAP regulation.

An interactive session during the last SoCSP meeting aimed to assess the alignment of the Vision with the CSPs, in which it was agreed that long-term regulatory stability and more flexibility in implementation is needed. It was noted that there are different platforms to discuss implementation, and all of them should be made use of to develop good CAP proposals.

The update from the Subgroup on [LEADER and territorial development \(SoLTD\)](#) by **Maria Jose Murciano** (Spanish Network) indicated that the March meeting of SoLTD had an in-depth discussion on the overall challenges and opportunities of LEADER and its role in the CAP. LEADER remains a key tool for rural development, but in order for it to stay successful, the LEADER method must be adhered to, communication around LEADER should be improved, the use of SCOs should be promoted, and women's roles within LEADER should be strengthened.

An update on monitoring and evaluation (M&E) from the last two meetings of the Expert group on the implementation of the CAP Strategic Plan Regulation by **Eric Markus** (Managing Authority, Sweden) and **Adrienn Csikai** (Hungarian Ministry of Agriculture) was then given.

During the October meeting, DG AGRI communicated plans for the EU level mid-term evaluation of CAP to be completed in 2026. In the November meeting, the Annual Performance clearance procedure was discussed, in particular challenges faced by Paying Agencies. Monitoring experts continue to have online meetings to interact and receive peer-to-peer feedback.

Remco Schreuder (Paying Agency, Netherlands) presented a report for the SG on the EU CAP Network [Assembly](#), where updates were given on the Steering Group and Subgroups, as well as updates on EU CAP Network activities. The EU CAP Network Strategic Framework was presented and adopted by Assembly members. An interactive session aimed to identify priority themes and strategic orientation for the EU CAP Network's AWP, and to identify networking opportunities among members of the Assembly.



Update on EU CAP Network activities

Representatives of the four support units of the EU CAP Network shared milestones of the current working programme.

Sergiu Didicescu (EU CAP Network) informed SG members about four important events. The [Seminar on Robotics and Artificial Intelligence in farming and forestry](#) aimed to showcase European cutting-edge AI and robotic technologies, highlighting their role in enhancing productivity, profitability, and sustainability. The [Brokerage event on Partnering for innovation with impact in agriculture and rural areas](#) aimed to prepare high-quality proposals for the Horizon Europe Cluster 6 calls, create linkages between EIP-AGRI Operational Groups and Horizon projects, and explore other funding opportunities for scaling innovations developed under Horizon and the CAP.

The [Seminar on On-farm demonstrations for peer-to-peer learning & innovation](#) aimed to promote the use of on-farm demonstrations as an essential tool for peer-to-peer learning and improve the setting up and visibility of demonstration farms, as well as foster their networks and connections with other relevant initiatives. The [Focus Group on Local perennial plant genetic resources in view of climate change and biodiversity loss](#) posed the main question: how can the conservation and utilisation of local under-utilised varieties of perennial crops be attractive and profitable for farmers and thereby contribute to biodiversity-friendly sustainable farming under climate change?

Anna Gregis (EU CAP Network) provided the SG with information about the [Good Practice Workshop on exploring the potential of simulation models for assessing the CAP](#), which aimed to showcase how simulation models can be used for evaluating the CAP, network, and exchange. A main conclusion from the Workshop was that simulation models are most useful for policy design and impact assessment, and the best approach is to combine them with other tools.



A key publication on [CAP Evaluation Insights on Generational Renewal](#) included a review of evaluation findings stemming from 26 Member States and UK evaluations. It assembles relevant empirical research on the topic and draws conclusions on the trends observed as well as on the evaluation challenges encountered.

David Lamb (EU CAP Network) informed SG members about two recent events: the [Farm Sustainability Data Network \(FSDN\) Workshop](#) and the [5th National Networks Meeting](#). The FSDN Workshop brought together participants to exchange on challenges and good experiences related to the transition from Farm Accountancy Data Network (FADN) to FSDN. Main conclusions were that FSDN is a big achievement, but there is a need to improve the usefulness of FSDN data for both policy and farm-level decisions and to ensure that all stakeholders work together to improve data access and sharing.

The main topics for the 5th National Networks Meeting included the identification, collection, and dissemination of good practices, organisation of good practice competitions, and the follow up on the initiatives presented during the 4th NN Meeting (Rural Ambassadors, Maxnet, Evaluation roadmap, Conference on digital tools). **David** also gave a brief update on ongoing Thematic Groups on the topics of [Economic Vulnerability of Farming](#), [Valuing Farmers' Wider Contributions to Society](#), and [Effective Approaches for Simplification within the CAP](#).

Nicolas Esgain (EU CAP Network) gave the SG an update on new website features and publications of the EU CAP Network. NNs now can request the translation of EU CAP Network publications into different languages using an [online form](#). Other new website features include a portal that includes sections on [digital tools](#), [robotics](#), [AI](#), [drones and sensors](#), [precision farming](#), [livestock farming](#), [forestry and food processing](#), and [digital innovation hubs](#). There are also new [webpages dedicated to networking](#), with sections on networking explained, National Networks, stakeholder involvement, and networking events.

Nicolas highlighted that the new [LAG Directory](#) can be searched by MS, key themes linked to LAGs' Local Development Strategies (LDSs), and LAGs that are interested in TNC. It also includes a new partner search tool for LAGs and an improved website menu. Recent key publications were also presented, including the [3rd edition of the EU CAP Network Magazine](#), the [11th edition of the Agrinnovation Magazine](#), and the [ARIA 2024 Projects Brochure](#). Nicolas reminded SG members of the [Publications Digest](#), which is a quarterly roundup featuring the latest publications, reports, and good practices released.

He also announced the recent launch of the [Annual Communication Survey](#), which aims to gather stakeholders feedback to assess the positioning of the EU CAP Network, by asking if the EU CAP Network is on the right platforms, and if the messages are shared in a satisfactory manner.

AOB, next steps and closing

The **Chair** thanked SG members for their inputs throughout the day and confirmed that all the meeting's objectives had been fulfilled. He invited members to visit the EU CAP Network website and to subscribe to the EU CAP Network newsletters. He gave a brief update on the future progression of the 2025-2026 Annual Work programme, which will be finalised by the end of June 2025.

