

'Determination, confidence and flexibility' essential for new entrants to ensure successful takeover

Becoming farmers was not all plain sailing for Magdalena and Christoph, but their drive and passion have helped them to overcome obstacles and adapt to new situations

Magdalena and Christoph Zelder were two young agricultural graduates when they took the plunge, buying and taking over a dairy farm in Wittlich in the west of Germany from a retiring farmer. From the very beginning, Magdalena tells us that "determination, confidence and flexibility" have been essential to their success as new entrants into farming. Their journey has not always been straightforward, but, almost 13 years later, they are still innovating and adapting the business as needed. In 2026, the couple will open a creche on the farm, providing much-needed rural childcare and supporting generational renewal.

Diversification has been key, "Having several income streams can be essential when milk prices are low," says Magdalena. Therefore, alongside dairy production, Magdalena and Christoph **run a range of educational activities**. They believe in educating children about the realities of farming and also in the power of the farm as a place of learning; **the new creche builds on this educational offer and is also a project to empower women**, as Magdalena explains: "In rural areas, all too often, young women have to put their careers to one side. We want to provide a local childcare solution for young farmers and rural inhabitants."

Another diversified form of income is through a local government scheme; **the farm receives money to take local garden waste, which is transformed into compost** for their arable land. For several years, **they also produced and sold eggs directly on the farm**, however, for health reasons, they decided to end this activity.

In 2013, when Christoph and Magdalena decided to start their farming business, **finding a suitable location was their first obstacle**.

Background information

The EU CAP Network has just published the [Agrinnovation magazine](#), focusing on generational renewal with many more examples from farmers like Magdalena and Christoph.

The EU CAP Network organised the [seminar 'Innovative tools for advisors'](#) on 19-20 March 2026 in Dublin, Ireland. It focused on different tools, including generational renewal tools to support farm succession.

Even though they both come from farming backgrounds, it was not possible to take over their family farms. After several years of searching, and even starting a farm partnership which fell through, they were almost ready to give up. But, by chance, Christoph's father met a local dairy farmer who was about to retire and wanted to sell his farm.

Securing a loan was the next major challenge; they were rejected by several banks. Finally, thanks to a detailed and solid business plan setting out forward-thinking and innovative future farm developments, they convinced one bank to offer a loan. Magdalena believes their success was also partly due to their passion: "You have to show the bank you have the right skills, but also that you really want what you're asking for."

Next, it was important to get the transition right. To ensure a smooth takeover, Magdalena and Christoph worked with the previous owner for three months, sharing knowledge and discussing future plans. The former owner also showed them the ins and outs of the farm, such as which fields were the wettest, and details of the electrics in the milking parlour.

With the creche opening soon and several other initiatives on the drawing board, they are constantly looking to the future. "As a farmer, you must be ready to adapt to different situations that life brings. Innovation, trial and error are all essential, and building flexibility into a plan from the start can be a support in the long term," Magdalena concludes.

EU Strategy for Generational Renewal in Agriculture

Faced with an aging farming population- in the EU today the average farmer age is 57, and only 7% of farmers are under 35- in October 2025, the EU launched a 'Strategy for Generational Renewal in Agriculture'. The strategy aims to attract more newcomers into farming, promoting funding schemes, access to credit, improved living conditions and infrastructure in rural areas and better support on legal matters.

Find out more about [the EU Strategy for Generational Renewal in Agriculture](#).

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Project information

Project contact

Magdalena Zelder
BerlingerhofGbr@t-online.de
 +49 (0)6571 9545305

EU CAP Network contact

Ina Van Hoya
 Communication manager
 Support Facility Innovation & Knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI
ina.vanhoye@eucapnetwork.eu
 +32 486 90 77 43

More information on Magdalena's farm - [website](#)

Project photos:

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Magdalena and Christoph Zelder in 2017 after a few years on the farm © **M. Reugels**



Magdalena with the cows on Berlingerhof farm © **T. Jaworr**



Magdalena working on the farm © **T. Jaworr**



Magdalena, Christoph and their children (the next generation) on the farm © **M. Reugels**

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EU CAP Network ‘Innovation & knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI’ activities related to generational renewal

Focus Groups

- › [EIP-AGRI Focus Group on ‘New entrants’](#)

Events

- › [EU CAP Network workshop: Young entrepreneurs - Engines of innovation in rural areas](#)
- › [EU CAP Network seminar ‘Innovative tools for advisors’](#)

Publications and videos

- › [The twelfth edition of the EU CAP Network’s annual Agrinnovation magazine - with a focus on generational renewal](#)
- › [EIP-AGRI Challenge video: young entrepreneurs, engines of rural innovation](#)
- › [EIP-AGRI Factsheet New Entrants](#)

Inspirational ideas

- › [Helping young entrepreneurs to ask the right questions](#) - Sweden
- › [Empowering rural women innovators across Europe](#)
- › [Training programmes to boost food-related entrepreneurship in European rural areas](#)

Operational Groups working on generational renewal

[58 Operational Groups working on generational renewal](#) are available in the [EIP-AGRI project database](#) (update March 2026)

- › Austria (3)
- › Belgium (1)
- › Czechia (1)
- › France (3)
- › Italy (12)
- › Netherlands (1)
- › Poland (1)
- › Spain (35)
- › Sweden (1)

Horizon multi-actor projects

Many multi-actor projects working on generational renewal are available on the [EIP-AGRI project database](#).

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.

- › [RURALIZATION - The opening of rural areas to renew rural generations, jobs and farms](#)
- › [PoliRural - Future Oriented Collaborative Policy Development for Rural Areas and People](#)

Thematic networks are collaborative platforms supported by Horizon Europe, 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.

- › [NEWBIE - New Entrant netWork: Business models for Innovation, entrepreneurship and resilience in European agriculture](#)

EU CAP Network events focusing on innovation, knowledge exchange and EIP-AGRI (July 2025 - June 2026)

Find out more details on the events below on the [EU CAP Network website](#) and in the [video clip](#).

- › EU CAP Network Focus Groups:
 - › **Focus Group: ‘Innovative on-farm energy production systems’**
 - › [1st meeting](#): 12-13 November 2025, Dublin, Ireland
 - › [2nd meeting](#): 21-22 April 2026, Lelystad, the Netherlands
 - › **Focus Group: ‘Forestry and forest health: new and emerging pests and diseases’**
 - › [1st meeting](#): 19-20 November 2025, Leuven, Belgium
 - › [2nd meeting](#): 5-6 March 2026, Hainburg an der Donau, Austria
 - › **Focus Group: ‘Innovative and sustainable ways to strengthen the role of farmers in revitalising the European wool value chain’**
 - › [1st meeting](#): 27-28 November 2025, Stockholm, Sweden
 - › [2nd meeting](#): 6-7 May 2026, Aranjuez, Spain
- › SolKE meetings:
 - › **SolKE: Subgroup on Innovation and Knowledge Exchange (SolKE) - 10th meeting**, 19 November 2025, online
 - › **SolKE: Subgroup on Innovation and Knowledge Exchange (SolKE) - 11th meeting**, 3 March 2026, Brussels, Belgium
 - › **SolKE: Subgroup on Innovation and Knowledge Exchange (SolKE) - 12th meeting**, June 2026, Brussels, Belgium

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- > [EU CAP Network workshop ‘Sensing the future: practical applications of proximal and remote sensing for farmers and advisors’](#), Valencia, Spain - 27-28 January 2026
- > [3rd EU CAP Network workshop ‘Networking for innovation and knowledge exchange’](#), Jūrmala, Latvia - 11-12 February 2026
- > [EU CAP Network Brokerage event](#), Warsaw, Poland - 25-26 February 2026
- > [EU CAP Network seminar ‘Innovative tools for advisors’](#), Dublin, Ireland - 19-20 March 2026
- > [EU CAP Network workshop ‘Growing alternative crops for new market opportunities in a changing climate’](#), Vienna, Austria - 22-23 April 2026
- > [EU CAP Network conference ‘Water resilience linked to sustainable soil management practices’](#), Hamburg, Germany - 19-21 May 2026
- > [3 cross-visits between EIP-AGRI Operational Groups](#) - June 2026
 - > [EU CAP Network cross-visit ‘Production of protein crops under climate change’](#)
 - > [EU CAP Network cross-visit ‘Robotics and artificial intelligence’](#)
 - > [EU CAP Network cross-visit ‘Plant genetic resources’](#)

