# EIP-AGRI Innovation Awards 2024
## for Operational Groups

## Guidelines for applicants

Since the establishment of EIP-AGRI in 2012, more than 3400 Operational Groups (OGs) have contributed to the increased productivity and sustainability of agriculture and forestry in the EU. Within the current CAP programming period 2023-2027, OGs remain a key tool to develop and implement innovative solutions which address practical challenges on the ground.

In order to celebrate the great variety of innovative OG projects and their achievements over the past eight years, the **EU CAP Network support unit for Innovation and Knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI** is organising **the EIP-AGRI Innovation Awards for Operational Groups on 7 May 2024** in Estoril (Portugal). The awards ceremony will be an integral part of the EU CAP Network Conference 'EIP-AGRI Operational Groups: Innovation in practice'.

The **main objective of the awards** is to recognise and reward outstanding EIP-AGRI OGs which have developed innovative practices, solutions, products and processes, thereby contributing to a sustainable and productive agriculture and forestry. The awards will also celebrate OGs driven by practitioners, that have addressed the needs of farmers and foresters and developed solutions that can be applied, replicated and implemented by others.

There are six categories of topics and, for each category, five OGs will be selected as nominees. From those nominees, one winner per category will receive an award. A seventh award will be given to the 'public favourite'. The awards are an opportunity for Operational Groups to gain visibility for their projects across the EU. Winners and nominees will be able to showcase their OGs at the EU CAP Network conference as well as on the EU CAP Network website and many other communication channels.

This document sets out the main guidelines to support Operational Groups in submitting their applications to the awards.

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# Awards categories

There are **six categories for the awards**. Operational Groups can apply to the one which is the most relevant to their project outcomes:

Category 1: Sustainable management of natural resources in farming practices
Category 2: Business models in food supply chains
Category 3: Animal welfare and husbandry
Category 4: Climate change mitigation and adaptation
Category 5: Sustainable forest management
Category 6: Digitalisation

The 'public favourite' award will be given based on a public vote.

For more detailed information the awards categories, please see below:

## Category 1: Sustainable management of natural resources in farming practices

The sustainable use of natural resources is key in improving the productivity and sustainability performance of agricultural systems. Innovative practices in resource efficiency and management play a role in supporting sustainable transitions in natural resource management in agricultural systems.

OGs applying within this category work, for example, on soil management and functionality, including issues related to soil fertility management, crop nutrition, contamination, soil pollution and bioremediation, soil biodiversity, soil compaction and soil erosion control. This category also covers water management, such as efficient and profitable irrigation or management of agriculture systems to protect groundwater. Topics include water reuse through treatments or purification, or the management of water resources across disciplines and spatial and administrative scales. Issues around air pollution are also included in this category.

## Category 2: Business models in food supply chains

Business models in food supply chains generally seek to resolve challenges and constraints on the access to land, labour, capital and markets, skills development and barriers in creating networks associated the acquisition of these resources and competences. Some business models aim to produce high value-added products (differentiated from commonly available products), diversify the farm business (e.g. into agri-tourism, landscaping, social or green care, education), and develop a share economy (sharing resources with others).

This category particularly focuses on short food supply chains, marketing and consumption initiatives which have the potential to improve farm incomes, promote sustainable farming systems and contribute to local economic development. There are

many different forms of short food supply chains in Europe, but applicant OGs must demonstrate the common characteristic of reducing numbers of intermediaries between the farmer or food producer, and the consumer.

## Category 3: Animal welfare and husbandry

In the EU context, animal welfare is an important issue. This is reflected in the significant number of OGs also working on the topics. This category covers OGs which work on topics such as: cage-free practices (e.g. for laying hens, sows and calves); monitoring and improving animal welfare through animal and resource-based indicators; using precision livestock farming and innovative tools and systems to improve animal welfare and sustainability of animal farms; exploring new commercial opportunities and added value of high-welfare products through information campaigns, certification and labelling schemes, and marketing.

## Category 4: Climate change mitigation and adaptation

Agriculture and rural areas are key for reaching the EU 2050 climate neutrality goal, as they can significantly contribute to reducing emissions, storing carbon and offsetting emissions. Applicant OGs in this category may be directly related to climate and climate change (including mitigation and adaptation), but applicants may also be OG projects which focus on issues that have relevance for the topic such as those working on energy management.

More specifically, applicant OGs work on climate change mitigation approaches including management practices that favour carbon soil sequestration, low-emission crop and livestock production systems, as well as systems that can both reduce emissions and promote further environmental benefits (e.g. mixed farming, agroforestry, agro-ecology, and organic farming), resource efficiency in energy and water use, fertilisers and plant protection, as well as methods and tools to assess emissions to the environment and carbon sequestering at the farm level.

From the climate change adaptation perspective, approaches include practices to withstand the effects of extreme weather events, water scarcity (e.g. mulching to conserve water and nutrients in the soil), as well as to better tackle new emerging pest and diseases, promote soil management practices that prevent the loss of organic matter through erosion, and the preservation of biodiversity and /or landscape features.

## Category 5: Sustainable forest management

The importance of forest-based value chains and the multifunctionality of forests for ensuring the prosperity of rural areas and achieving sustainability in current times and in the future is highlighted through the EU Forest Strategy. One of the main focuses of the strategy is developing a strong research and innovation agenda to improve our knowledge on forests, in order to ensure forests' socio-economic function is enhanced.

OGs applying within this category work on innovative practices and measures including climate-smart forestry, pest and diseases management, tackling forest degradation and nature restoration, improving the provision of forest ecosystem services, as well as new technologies and digital tools for integrated forest management approaches. They could also focus on forest management techniques contributing to the circular bioeconomy and environmentally friendly resource use (e.g.by carbon storage), creating new value chains and by substituting non-renewable materials.

## Category 6: Digitalisation

The fast-paced development of digital technologies and solutions creates significant opportunities for actors in the agriculture sector. Today, many farmers are already using digital technologies such as smartphones, tablets, in-field sensors, drones and satellites. These technologies provide a range of solutions such as remote measurement of soil conditions, better water management, livestock and crop monitoring and many more. Therefore, digitalisation has great potential to increase profitability, improve working conditions for farmers, foresters and other practitioners, and improve the environmental and climate impact of agriculture and forestry.

Innovative approaches for OGs applying in this category include precision agriculture, robotics, decision support tools and digital marketing. Furthermore, digitalisation strategies, through the development of digital platforms and tools, are key for enhancing knowledge flow between actors in AKIS. OGs in this cross-cutting category therefore could work on developing and testing digitalisation approaches within a wide range of themes, including those covered in the other five categories. Applicants could also focus on digital skills development, education and training.

## + Public favourite award

Once the nominees' videos are collected, voting for the 'public favourite' will be opened to the wider European public several weeks/one month prior to the awards ceremony. People will be able to vote for one of the 30 nominees on the awards webpage.

# Selection process and criteria

Applications to the awards should be coordinated among Operational Group project partners so that one single application per project is provided.

Applicant OGs can apply to only one of the six award categories. Applications must be submitted in English.

It is a two-step selection process:
1. **Step 1:** for all applicants - Submission of an application form, based on which the selection of the nominees will be made,
2. **Step 2:** for nominated OG projects only - Submission of videos, based on which the final selection of the winners will be made.

## Step 1:

### Eligibility check

The eligibility criteria are as follows:

**EITHER:**

- The OG has concluded their activity, meaning that the project has ended and has concrete outcomes which can be new or improved practice, solution, product or process that can be applied by end users, replicated, implemented in other environments,
  **OR**
- The OG is at the final stages of its implementation (will be finished at latest 4 months after the closing deadline of the awards (closing deadline 8 February 2024) and already have concrete results/innovations to showcase.

OGs must meet these eligibility criteria for its application to be considered.

Applicant OGs will be informed of their eligibility on **15 February 2024**.

### Selection of nominees

The award criteria are as follows:

**Criteria 1:** OGs have to demonstrate the innovative character of the developed practice, solution, product or process linked to the challenge addressed in their project. OGs must demonstrate that the project addresses the needs of farmers and foresters, that the solution was developed together with the practitioners and that it can be applied, replicated and implemented by end users. OGs should also demonstrate how they combined the complementary expertise in their partnerships in order to co-create the final solution.

› **Criteria 2:** OGs need to demonstrate how they have disseminated their results outside the project, including proven outreach to practitioners, especially farmers and foresters

› **Criteria 3:** OGs should demonstrate how they perform in at least one (or more) of the following aspects:

- › *Transferability*: The OG results can be transferred to a different context (farm, region, etc) and be successfully implemented

- › *Scalability*: The OG results can be successfully implemented at a larger scale

- › *Market value creation*: The OG projects results have created new market opportunities for the participants of the OG, for example through improved quality, product diversification/differentiation, adapting to changing market demands, innovations in packaging, logistics and processing.

## Step 2:

The eligible applicants will be informed whether they have been selected among the nominees by **8 March 2024.**

The 30 nominees will be invited to submit videos by **1 April 2024** presenting their OG projects. These videos will contribute to the selection of the winners in each category. A public vote will also be launched to select the 'public favourite' amongst the 30 nominees. This will open on **15 April 2024** and will remain open until **3 May 2024.**

The nominees will be automatically invited to attend the EU CAP Network Conference 'EIP-AGRI Operational Groups: Innovation in practice' and the awards ceremony.

**Awards and recognition**
Nominated OG projects will get the opportunity to broaden their European visibility through participating in the awards. They will receive access to the full conference programme which includes many networking opportunities. Additionally, their video submissions will be showcased during the conference and disseminated as part of the 'public favourite' vote. All nominated OGs will have the chance to showcase their innovative outcomes during the exhibition part of the conference, where they can also network and exchange freely.

The winners will receive recognition of the innovation they have developed in the form of an award. At the awards ceremony which takes place on the first day of the conference, the nominees will receive runner-up honours and the winners in each category will be presented with a diploma and a symbolic award. All OG projects will also gain significant European visibility through EU CAP Network communication products.

# Applying to the awards and to the conference

We strongly encourage all Operational Groups which have developed innovative practices, solutions, products and processes to apply to **both** the awards **and** to the conference.

The deadline for both is the **8 February 2024.**

› [Webpage for the EIP-AGRI Innovation Awards for Operational Groups](#)
› [Webpage for the EU CAP Network Conference 'EIP-AGRI Operational Groups: Innovation in practice'](#)

For any questions regarding the awards, please contact
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