

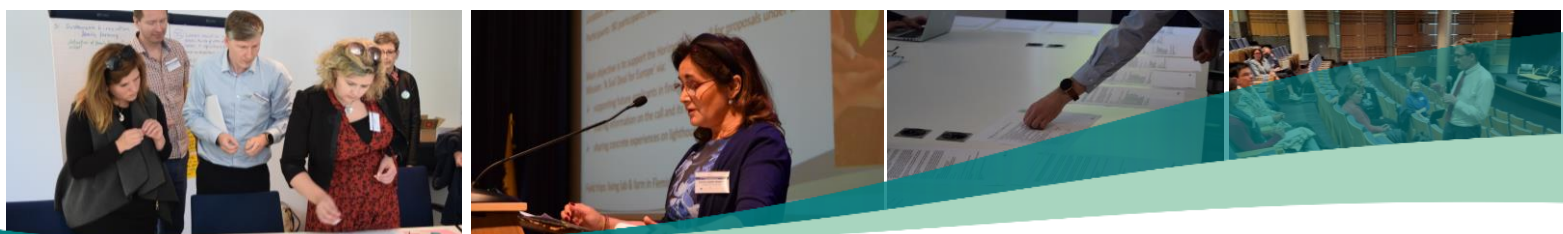


# Subgroup on Innovation for agricultural productivity and sustainability

22<sup>nd</sup> Meeting

*2 June 2022*

**REPORT**



The Subgroup on Innovation (SOI) met for the twenty-second time on 2 June 2022, in Brussels (Belgium).

The objectives of the meeting were:

- a) To present and further shape the upcoming networking activities for 2022;
- b) To present the long-term vision for the EU's rural areas and the Rural Pact conference;
- c) To analyse and discuss the proposals for EIP-AGRI networking activities to be carried out in 2023;
- d) To exchange on relevant ongoing and planned activities and events in the Member States.

## Welcome, introduction and networking

### *Introduction by DG AGRI*

#### *Introduction by Antonia Gamez Moreno*

Antonia Gamez Moreno, Head of 'Unit D1 - Rural areas and networks' DG AGRI, opened the meeting and gave a formal welcome to the SOI members. She brought an update on the latest developments within the EIP-AGRI network. You can find her [presentation here](#).

First she shared the main highlights on the two upcoming events: the [EIP-AGRI Brokerage event 'Get involved in the EU Mission 'A Soil Deal for Europe''](#), and [the EIP-AGRI Workshop 'Conversion to organic farming: innovative approaches and challenges'](#). She also provided the Subgroup members with some updates on the three ongoing EIP-AGRI Focus Groups and their second meetings.

Regarding the EIP-AGRI publications, the most recent ones are the [EIP-AGRI factsheet on Wildlife and agricultural production](#) and two press articles: [EIP-AGRI - News - Press- Improving soil biodiversity to reduce inputs](#) , and [EIP-AGRI- News- Press on Using data to manage environmental impact of livestock farming](#). Subgroup members were also informed that the Agri-innovation magazine issue 8 would be published within the next days after the SOI meeting, and that an EIP-AGRI brochure on Organic farming will come out in September 2022. An update on the online community of the EIP-AGRI network and its various social media platforms was also presented.

Antonia Gamez Moreno then updated the Subgroup members on the state of play of the CAP Reform. All Member States (MSs) have submitted their draft CAP strategic plans (CAP SP) by 17<sup>th</sup> of March 2022, and since then DG AGRI has also finalised all observation letters. These letters identify the elements of the plans that require further explanation, completion or adjustments before CAP SPs are approved by the Commission. Currently, DG AGRI is having bilateral meetings with MSs to discuss their replies to these letters, showing how MSs will address the observations made by the Commission. Separate meetings with each MS are being organised to discuss possible ways to strengthen the AKIS and the coherence between various AKIS interventions. The Commission has published the observation letters and the comments from MSs [here](#).

Regarding the governance of the CAP Network, Antonia Gamez Moreno informed that DG AGRI intends to launch the governance structure of the new CAP Network in October 2022 (to be confirmed), building upon current ENRD and EIP-AGRI governance. In the draft implementing act setting out the

organisational structure and operation of the European CAP network (Article 126(5) of Regulation (EU) No 2021/2115), DG AGRI proposed to keep the European Rural Network Assembly, the Steering Group, and to have three (instead of two) permanent subgroups, focusing on the following areas:

- LEADER and Territorial Development;
- Innovation and Knowledge exchange;
- CAP Strategic Plans.

Antonia Gamez Moreno ended her presentation by showing the most recent statistics on Operational Group projects (OGs): there are 2424 OGs currently registered in SFC, which means that 241 new OGs have been added since the last SOI meeting in March. Besides, four new countries have now registered OGs for the first time - these are Czech Republic, Estonia, Malta and Romania.

### ***Introduction by Kerstin Rosenow***

Kerstin Rosenow, Head of 'Unit F2 - Research and Innovation' DG AGRI, warmly welcomed Subgroup members and presented the main new developments in Horizon Europe. You can find her [presentation here](#).

She informed the Subgroup members that the calls for 2021 and 2022 under the Cluster 6: Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment are now closed, with new projects funded by the 2021 call now starting, while the evaluation process for the 2022 call is ongoing.

An overview on the Cluster 6 Work Programme (WP) for 2023-2024 was presented, with a reference to the Co-fund European Partnerships that will cover a preliminary total number of 178 topics for 2023 & 2024 under two destinations:

- Destination 2: European partnership on accelerating farming systems transition: agro-ecology living labs and research infrastructures;
- Destination 2: European partnership on animal health and welfare;
- Destination 2: European partnership on safe and sustainable food systems for people, plant and climate;
- Destination 7: European Partnership of Agriculture of Data.

Kerstin Rosenow underlined that the current geopolitical situation due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine has an impact on the policy priorities, with specific attention to rapidly reducing the dependence on Russian fossil fuels and fast forwarding the green transition, and on safeguarding food security and reinforcing the resilience of food systems.

The research and innovation priorities related to agriculture, forestry and rural areas were then presented within the context of the Farm to Fork Strategy, the new EU Forest Strategy for 2030 and the Long-term Vision for rural areas.

Additionally, the timeline for the Cluster 6 Work Programme 2023-2024 was shared with Subgroup members: DG AGRI is currently discussing the third draft with MSs, while the WP 2023-2024 will be published in December 2022.

Kerstin Rosenow ended her presentation with a reference to the 'EU Mission: a Soil Deal for Europe', where new funding opportunities are now open to contribute to the mission implementation. The Horizon Europe Work Programme 2021-2022 amendment was adopted on 10 May 2022 and so calls have opened and have been published on the [Funding and Tenders portal](#). The deadline for

applications is 27 September 2022. To finalise, she underlined the importance of the upcoming EIP-AGRI brokerage event in supporting good quality proposals for the EU Mission 'A Soil Deal for Europe' call that was launched in May.

## Session I: upcoming EIP-AGRI activities

This session was dedicated to the upcoming EIP-AGRI activities in the second semester of 2022: draft concept notes for these activities were presented, to be fine-tuned with inputs from Subgroup members.

Three speakers from the EIP-AGRI Support Facility (SF) presented:

- The draft call texts for the three new EIP-AGRI Focus Groups: FG 47. Biodiversity in farmland, FG 48. Social innovation in farming and FG 49. Recovery of abandoned land;
- The draft concept note for the proposed EIP-AGRI seminar on AKIS;
- The draft concept note for the proposed EIP-AGRI workshop on young entrepreneurs.

These presentations were followed by an interactive session, with five breakouts organised per activity. Subgroup members could choose to join two of these discussion groups. The aim of this interactive session was to further shape and fine-tune the concepts for the afore-mentioned activities.

### 1.1. Draft call texts for the three new EIP-AGRI Focus Groups

Willemine Brinkman (EIP-AGRI SF) presented the draft call texts for the three new EIP-AGRI Focus Groups: FG 47. Biodiversity in farmland, FG 48. Social innovation in farming, and FG 49. Recovery of abandoned land. You can find her presentation [here](#).

The call for participation in the three Focus Groups will be published on 28 June 2022 and it will be closed on 19 September 2022. The first meetings are planned for January 2023 and the second ones will be in May-June 2023. Their reports should be ready by September 2023.

Willemine Brinkman (EIP-AGRI SF) presented the main question and the main tasks for each Focus Group. She then invited the Subgroup members to provide inputs in the breakout sessions and announced that the draft call texts will be shared in the SOI Collaborative Area for additional comments.

#### ➤ *Main highlights from the breakout discussions on FG 47. Biodiversity in farmland*

The proposed main question for this Focus Group is 'How can farmers create and maintain high-diversity landscape features (HDLF) that positively impact farmland biodiversity?'

Participating Subgroup members suggested that the Focus Group could investigate existing good practices and innovative ways on how to maintain or create HDLF, as well as to look into what is missing and still needed to achieve that purpose.

At farm level, the Focus Group should build on the concept of circularity and principles of reduced use of artificial fertilisers, reduction of cattle and use of manure. In many situations, HDLF require active management to prevent encroachment of invasive species, to prevent species loss and forest growth. At landscape level, it is important to improve connectivity of HDLF between farms as these features often serve for shelter and support the transit and feeding of various species.

The group emphasised that maintaining and creating new HDLF can trigger synergies: e.g., features that prevent wind erosion and contribute to C sequestration, and enhanced functional biodiversity that benefits pollination and supports natural enemies of various pests.

The Focus Group could also explore the role of digitalisation and precision farming tools: for example, the use of precision harvesting machines that can distinguish between crops and landscape features, and those that minimise the use of fertilisers and pesticides which helps to protect local biodiversity.

The group also discussed ecosystem services at farm level and how to valorise them. It was for instance suggested to look at marketing aspects, in particular labelling. Efforts need to be made to identify best marketing practices, and explore how marketing can help increase farm profitability. On the other hand, consumers need to better understand the value of a product and the concept of HDLF, thus business models should build on a strong link with consumers and a better understanding of the values behind a product. It may be interesting for stakeholders to know what farmers do to protect biodiversity, creating opportunities for educational and tourism activities.

Besides the market-related aspects, small changes to improve ecosystem services can have a significant positive effect for the farm: e.g., through careful analysis of the farm and smart use of residual land, very small adjustments may bring big benefits. A UK study demonstrated that significant productivity gains can be obtained from small adjustments in the farm.

Subgroup members also mentioned that agricultural schools/universities should pay more attention to HDLF by including links between production and biodiversity in their curricula, and that this could then be further connected with advisory services. Lighthouse farms and networks of demonstration farms should be emphasised, identifying farms and farmers wishing to cooperate and share knowledge in the field of HDLF.

➤ ***Main highlights from breakout discussions on FG 48. Social innovation in farming***

The proposed main question for this Focus Group is 'How can social farming and related innovations benefit farms and rural areas?'

Subgroup members considered that there is a need to take the whole society into account and not only rural areas since the social factor is also very important in urban farming. Besides, the end-users or participants of social farming in rural communities are often urban citizens.

The focus could be on social integration and health, rather than on tourism or educational visits to farms. Examples are: benefits from having elderly people living on farms and people with mental and/or physical disabilities working on farms; therapeutic effects of working or interacting with animals; integration of newcomers through work on farms (to develop their social life), etc. Additionally, there could be a link to farms as shelters for vulnerable people from urban areas.

All actors need to be taken into account (e.g., ministry of health, health agencies and associations) and cooperation between all ministries involved is needed.

There is a complex balance between farming and the other services that a farm provides (such as social/health care) and so farmers need specific support to keep this balance.

In some countries there are legal challenges facing social farming: for instance, in Slovenia, there is a farm working with disabled people who cannot find jobs elsewhere, where it was initially difficult to align the project with legislation.

A support system needs to be built around social farming, while it is important to consider the types of investment needed from a farmer and how he/she will manage time (split between farming and providing social services). Financial support for social farming is needed, but also support in areas

where farmers lack the necessary skills or knowledge. Farmers are not educators, social workers or health care providers, so other services need to be brought in.

LEADER and social funds (possibly in a multi-fund approach), should be considered by the Focus Group: discussing which ones (and which combinations) are better suited for social farming. Social innovation is not really the focus of farmers or agricultural advisors. More attention is needed for social innovation in agriculture and on how to finance it.

Participating Subgroup members also highlighted that one point to take in consideration is to understand from which angle the Focus Group will be looking at social farming: is it to try and create income diversification for farmers or is it about social improvement in rural areas? The Focus Group could possibly consider both perspectives, but it would be easier to focus on income diversification because, for this single purpose, farmers' skills are sufficient and there's no need to consider the involvement of other ministries, nor to look at varied types of funding, or to change legislation. On the other hand, thinking about how to bring the various sectors together could be one of the main points for discussion in the Focus Group.

Innovative examples can also be found for instance in Erasmus projects (e.g., Green Care projects, Austria).

➤ **Main highlights from breakout discussions on FG 49. Recovery of abandoned land**

The proposed main question for this Focus Group is 'How to foster new, practical ways for better management of abandoned agricultural land in a sustainable way?'

The breakout group mentioned that the reasons for land abandonment differ between MSs and regions, and suggested to consider the variety of situations. Clearly identifying the different reasons leading to land abandonment will enable the Focus Group to propose well-adapted innovation paths. Besides, it will also allow to determine which reasons are out of the scope of the Focus Group (for example political ones).

One of the key points highlighted by the Subgroup members is that the Focus Group's starting paper needs to define what is meant by abandoned land within the context of its work.

It was also suggested to identify the stakeholders who are dealing with land abandonment, and to include discussions on the challenges that young farmers are facing regarding access to land.

The Focus Group should also examine different ways and tools used for the recovery of abandoned land, for example land exchange or new technological ways for land rehabilitation, while bearing in mind that their application should depend on the type of reason(s) behind land abandonment. The recovery of abandoned lands should be done taking into account all EU needs, not only those linked to agricultural production but also for example to enhancing biodiversity.

Participants also reflected that land abandonment may equally apply to forests, which then could be a topic for another Focus Group.



## 1.2. Draft concept note for the EIP-AGRI seminar on AKIS

Margarida Ambar (EIP-AGRI SF) introduced the draft concept note for the EIP-AGRI seminar on AKIS which will take place in the second semester of 2022. You can find her presentation [here](#).

The seminar will last 1.5 days and the number of participants will be 150 - 200.

As CAP Strategic Plans will enter into force at the beginning of 2023, MSs are preparing their implementation, organising all the relevant actors, putting in place tools and planning activities. Multiple needs for mutual learning and knowledge exchange on several topics, have emerged from the MSs CAP SPs analysis - the seminar aims to tackle several of these topics.

Margarida Ambar then invited the Subgroup members to further finetune the concept of the seminar during the breakout session.

### ➤ *Main highlights from breakout discussions*

The discussion aimed at identifying the most relevant and priority topics that the seminar should address. The Subgroup members confirmed that the topic on advisory services is very relevant, particularly on how to meet all requirements under 'Article 15 - Farm advisory services' of the new Regulation.

Overall, the group considered that the seminar should cover the three topics as proposed in the concept note ((1) AKIS coordination bodies, (2) knowledge reservoirs and (3) connecting the CAP and Horizon Europe), complemented by a session on the integration of advisors into AKIS.

While discussing how AKIS can be supported through CAP Strategic Plans (CAP SPs), it was mentioned that even if some MSs may not allocate any budget specifically to the AKIS management / coordination, AKIS can be supported via various interventions (e.g., a 'back-office' may be settled under Article 78) and even national funding can be used for this purpose. Therefore, it would be useful to exchange between MSs on this matter.

The group emphasised the need to discuss how innovation support services (ISS) can be interlinked to innovation advisors, what synergies may emerge, and how to make a smart mix. In addition, it could be discussed how ISS can support OGs, especially as the scope of OGs will be broadened to cover all CAP Strategic Objectives. ISS may also have a crucial role in guiding farmers, for instance, through administrative procedures and in providing practical recommendations on how to create and develop partnerships.

The link between the CAP and the Horizon programme was highlighted as a very important topic. It was mentioned that the connection between the two may exist at expert/ project level. However, at coordination level there is still work to be done to further connect both. It was also noted that the roles of the different actors within this context, Horizon NCPs, NRNs and ISS, need to be clarified through concrete examples and good practices. How CAP Networks can be associated to Horizon Europe would also require further clarification.

It was also mentioned that the concept of AKIS is still a challenge for some actors. It is complex, and it seems that every time there is a discussion about it, a new perspective or dimension is added. This needs to be considered while taking into account different perspectives: EU, national, regional, local. The question is also if it is clear what it means to farmers? It was also mentioned that in many MSs, there is also a need to clarify the AKIS concept at policy level.

During the discussion it was pointed out that there is still an innovation gap between MSs, which is an issue that can possibly be addressed through a different activity such as a capacity building event for 2023.

### **1.3. Draft concept note for the EIP-AGRI workshop “Young entrepreneurs and startups”**

Szabolcs Biro (EIP-AGRI SF) presented the draft concept note for the EIP-AGRI workshop on young entrepreneurs and startups. You can find his presentation [here](#).

#### **➤ Main highlights from breakout discussions**

Subgroup participants suggested that the concept of supporting an environment of entrepreneurship needs a broader, holistic approach, taking into account the different funding sources, both public and private. Existing differences in cultural contexts should be taken into account. Furthermore, it is important to further build capacities in innovation in rural areas, as a long-term strategy, both for farmers and businesses. This could motivate young entrepreneurs to stay or to settle in rural areas. The workshop could consider two perspectives: the flow of successful entrepreneurs from urban to rural areas, and the transformation of rural youth into entrepreneurs. The focus should be on how to foster innovation and how to inspire young people to nurture their business ideas in rural areas. The scope could be broader than agricultural business. Development funds besides the CAP should be considered (e.g., regional development, cohesion, social funds). Nevertheless, the concept of the workshop should be narrowed down to entrepreneurial challenges and solutions in marginalised areas, with a strong economic focus, while taking into consideration their diversity and their possible development paths.

It was suggested to explore possibilities for starting up rural businesses related to the Long-term Vision for the EU’s Rural Areas and the outcomes of the Rural Pact conference. The role of rural communities and municipalities (even companies) in supporting young people could be discussed.

Subgroup members highlighted the need to learn from experiences in mobilising and activating young people as leaders, innovators and entrepreneurs, and from the supporting /enabling landscapes and initiatives already in place. The group emphasised the relevance of showcasing good examples, like some LEADER social innovation startups with young people, training projects, and the Horizon 2020 project ‘Social Innovation in Marginalised Rural Areas’ - SIMRA. The role of the concept on ‘Smart villages’ and other initiatives including digital, healthcare and social aspects could also be considered. Good examples of programmes related to the development of entrepreneurial ecosystems (on education, investment, funds, local infrastructures, etc.) should contribute to the discussion and better understanding of needs. It is important to explore opportunities besides the CAP that are fostering young entrepreneurship.

Participants considered that the objectives described in the draft concept note are adequate. Discussions on the identification of needs and barriers should also target management authorities and decision makers. Overall, the importance of generational renewal and the multiple dimensions and complexities of youth marginalisation need to be taken into account.



## Session II: The Long-term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas and the Rural Pact conference

Alexia Rouby, from 'Unit D1 – Rural areas and networks' (DG AGRI), presented the Long-Term Vision for EU's Rural Areas and the Rural Pact conference. You can find her presentation [here](#).

The European Commission (EC) communication on a Long-term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas was adopted in June 2021 and identifies areas of actions towards stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas and communities. The vision is organised around 10 shared goals, that spell out the aspirations of rural communities by 2040. There are two main ways to achieve these goals: a Rural Action Plan was created by the EC. In addition, there is the Rural Pact, through which the EC wants to join forces and foster cooperation among authorities and stakeholders at all levels (EU, national, regional and local level).

The **Rural Action Plan** is a comprehensive plan that cuts across the various policies and departments of the EU, integrating 24 thematic actions (9 flagship initiatives and 15 accompanying actions), that are already being implemented.

Within the flagship initiatives, there is one that refers to "Research and Innovation (R&I) for rural communities" that is based on dedicated R&I actions under Horizon Europe Cluster 6 to address the needs of rural communities more broadly: agriculture, mobility, digitalization, energy, climate actions, social service, health care, education, social economy, etc.

This flagship initiative highlights the need to boost networking and knowledge exchange activities through: AKIS and CAP networks (EIP-AGRI), LEADER, smart specialisation platforms and the new initiative: the Forum of start-up villages.

The Rural Action Plan also includes six horizontal actions such as the Rural proofing (reviewing policies through rural lens), the EU Rural observatory (centralising data collection in the rural data platform) and the combination of EU funds (toolkit to access EU Funds for rural areas).

The **Rural Pact** is a framework for interaction between all levels of governance and stakeholders dealing with rural development, and aims at achieving the shared goals of the Rural vision. DG AGRI set up several actions to launch and develop the Rural Pact such as the creation of the Rural Pact Community in December 2021 - stakeholders can join this community at any time [here](#).

The proposed three objectives of the Rural Pact are to amplify rural voices, networking and acting for rural areas. The first objective refers to the need to put rural areas higher on the political agenda. The second objective is about structuring and enabling mutual learning, collaboration and exchange of best practices. The third objective aims at encouraging and inviting people to act for the rural vision through voluntary commitments.

All the preparatory activities lead to the organisation of the Rural Pact conference, that will take place on 15 and 16 June 2022, with the following objectives: engaging all levels of governance and rural stakeholders in endorsing the goals of the vision and debating on how to reach them; involving participants in the implementation of the vision, and increasing the visibility of rural areas.

On the first day of the conference participants will look at what can be done at the various levels of governance, while the second day will be dedicated to shared goals across policy fields, with

discussions organised in three strands: stronger rural areas, connected and prosperous rural areas, and resilient rural areas. There will be web streaming from plenaries, and pitches in breakouts will be filmed and [available online](#). One of the parallel sessions is dedicated to rural research and innovation ecosystems and will explore how these can be strengthened ([recording](#), [presentations](#)).

The presentation was followed by a Q&A session:

- **Q:** Could you tell us about the anticipated relationship between the concept of the smart villages and the concept of start-up villages?
- **A:** There has been a lot of development around Smart villages – this is the broad approach endorsed by the CAP, with two ongoing Preparatory Actions (Smart Rural 21 and Smart Rural 27 projects). More recently, there have been some accompanying actions in the Rural Action Plan that are specifically linked to LEADER, Smart Villages and the Rural Data Platform. The smart village concept includes a focus on community-led development at local level, with all types of innovation and digitalisation playing a key role.  
The concept of Start-up Villages initially comes from a preparatory action under DG Connect on innovative start-ups and entrepreneurship to boost the local economy in villages and rural areas. Start-up Villages are a subcategory of Smart Villages with a strong focus on start-ups. The forum on start-up villages, implemented by the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission is a new initiative to try to explore what this new concept could bring and focuses on start-up led innovation.

### Session III: Shaping the work of the EIP-AGRI for 2023

The objective of the third session was to reflect on topics for EIP-AGRI networking activities for 2023, identifying priority themes and discussing their scope. After a short introduction by Margarida Ambar (EIP-AGRI SF), Magdalena Mach, 'Unit D1 - Rural areas and networks' (DG AGRI), gave a general overview of the proposals which were collected from the following sources (you can find her presentation [here](#)):

- A survey for Subgroup members held between 15 March and 12 April 2022;
- Inputs from the network collected through the EIP-AGRI website and networking activities;
- Analysis carried out by the EIP-AGRI SF team.

The collected topics were clustered in seven thematic areas. It was mentioned that the high number of clusters with the high variety of topics reflects the current situation, where the new CAP objectives call for topics beyond the agriculture sector.

Subgroup members were invited to help identify priority topics. Four breakout groups were created:

- Breakout Group 1 discussing Cluster A - AKIS and EIP-AGRI and Cluster E - Agricultural digitalisation;
- Breakout Group 2 discussing Cluster B - Efficient management of natural resources;
- Breakout Group 3 discussing Cluster C - Sustainable Value chain, Competitiveness and Circular Bioeconomy;
- Breakout Group 4 discussing Cluster D - Social and organisational innovations in farming and rural areas, Cluster F - Animal health and welfare and Cluster G - Other ideas.

After two rounds of discussion, the main highlights from the group discussions were shared in plenary. Those highlights are presented below.

### **3.1. Breakout Group 1: Cluster A - AKIS and EIP-AGRI and Cluster E - Agricultural Digitalisation**

The topics in both clusters were presented to the Subgroup members. No additional topics were proposed. The Subgroup members were then invited to vote for priority topics. The topics that received most votes were:

1. Exchange of knowledge and innovations in the EU
2. Support the building of a national network of living laboratories and demonstration facilities
3. Consolidating the EIP-AGRI implementation within the European CAP Network
4. Best practice examples of Operational Groups, especially new business models

Regarding Topic 1 – ‘Exchange of knowledge and innovations in the EU’ the Subgroup members highlighted that this is a very ambitious theme (particularly as it was suggested to cover broad issues such as soil, climate, nitrogen, biodiversity, water quality) and so it should be tackled through a conference where many participants can join and different types of actors can be brought together and approach the topic from various perspectives: practice, policy and research. It could be an event similar to the previous Agri summits, maybe on the management of natural resources, with different discussion groups organised around different themes.

The conference could include sessions on exchanging and learning about concrete examples of projects and identifying good practices which then relates to topic ‘5 - Best practice examples of Operational Groups, especially new business models’. The policy angle of the conference could focus on how CAP Strategic Plans can support knowledge exchange, through OGs and other interventions.

Field trips can be part of the conference and support its objectives, making discussions as concrete as possible. Field visits are related to topic ‘3 - Support the building of a national network of living laboratories and demonstration facilities’ and so living labs and demonstration facilities can be visited during the conference.

Subgroup participants proposed to bring together topics 1, 3 and 5 because they are closely related.

Regarding Topic 4 – ‘Consolidating the EIP-AGRI implementation within the European CAP Network’, participants suggested that this topic could focus on how to support the creation of OGs under all 9 CAP strategic objectives and how to support advisory systems. It is important to acknowledge that there is an innovation gap between the MSs and so one of the objectives could be capacity building, supporting the evolution of the innovation ecosystem. This topic could be tackled through a series of workshops organised in different MSs.

### **3.2. Breakout Group 2: Cluster B - Efficient management of natural resources**

The reporting back from the breakout group focused on the topics most voted, namely:

- Topic 9 - Sharing of practices on safe soils, diagnostic and measuring tools (biological activity, N2O emissions....);
- Topic 13 - Integrating climate change and biodiversity restoration at farm level;
- Topic 17 - Water and Climate Change;
- Topic 20 - Marketing channels for organic agriculture.

Regarding topic 9 - Sharing of practices on safe soils, diagnostic and measuring tools (biological activity, N2O emissions....), the ideas that emerged were related to practices on safe / healthy soils and diagnostic tools, such as smart drainage systems (that catch nutrients before they leak into water), slow-release fertilisers (beneficial for environment but costly), reducing deep ploughing and different types of tillage (strip tillage, minimum tillage, etc.). Other good practices were mentioned, such as best timings for fertilisation from a climate point of view. This topic could be tackled in a larger event such as a seminar.

Another highly voted topic was number 13 - Integrating climate change and biodiversity restoration at farm level, where the discussion focused on soil biodiversity and practices to enhance it, while it was highlighted that these practices are also beneficial for tackling climate change. Participants referred to practices that increase biodiversity, preserve nutrients in soil and that reduce the use of pesticides (e.g., plant cover during winter provides shelter for various species and increases soil carbon). The topic should be upscaled to landscape level instead of farm level, so that local breeds and local plant varieties can be taken into account.

Regarding topic 17 - Water and Climate Change, it was highlighted that, even if there were already numerous EIP-AGRI activities related to water, problems related to the excess of water have not been tackled yet, while floods have been a problem in different parts of Europe. Therefore, this is a potential scope for a future networking activity, where strategic approaches for water management and infrastructures (e.g., for water storage in periods of abundance) could be discussed. The group highlighted that there is a need to think more strategically about water management.

Subgroup members also discussed topic 20 - Marketing channels for organic agriculture, and the group considered that the focus should be on the demand side and that the main issue to tackle is how to find innovative ways to stimulate the demand side - for instance, by involving the whole value chain in a kind of multi-actor approach, involving retailers, consumers, etc.

### **3.3. Breakout Group 3: Cluster C - Sustainable value chain, competitiveness and circular bioeconomy**

The topic that received most votes from Subgroup participants was number 25 - Food and energy security whilst ensuring and increasing sustainability. It was concluded that there is a need to have several networking activities on this topic in the future. Some of the angles to tackle may be consumers' behavior and food security and self-sufficiency. Environmental sustainability also needs to be prioritised. Land use, for instance, is a relevant perspective to take into consideration, it needs to be diversified and to be deployed both for energy and food production. There should be demonstration facilities that show how food autonomy and security can be achieved with circular economy approaches. Perhaps the focus of production needs to change: land needs to be used for food

production, while the importance of biomass production also needs to be taken into account. Priority should be given to the development of circular systems, with energy and fertiliser use as important factors.

Topic 22 'Breeding insects for food and feed' was also discussed in the breakout. It was suggested that the focus could be on insect breeding programmes and animal welfare. Commercial production of insects could be incentivised, increasing current production and making it more common. The group also suggested to organise field visits within the context of this topic.

Regarding topic 26 – 'Business models supporting transition to a sustainable agriculture and forestry', it was highlighted that business models should be developed taking on board many other aspects and not only production at farm level. Supply chain organisations should be working on business models. New business models should be developed taking into consideration the ecosystem services provided by agriculture and forestry sectors, also to boost and diversify the off-farm activities and upgrade the whole supply chain (as already happening in some Northern EU countries). For instance, forest owners who are providing ecosystem services need to be compensated for the nature values they create / maintain.

Another popular topic was number 21 - Plant protein in Europe for food and feed, where it was suggested that the focus of the networking activity could be on the use of genetically modified organisms (GMO) for soy feed production. This topic could be addressed in an EIP-AGRI Focus Group.

### **3.4. Breakout Group 4: Clusters D, F and G**

In this breakout session, 3 clusters were presented: Cluster D on Social Farming, Cluster F on Animal welfare and Cluster G with other topics. Participants expressed most interest in Cluster D, broadening the EIP-AGRI activities to social and organisational innovations and its topics were discussed in both rounds.

Topic 33 "Women innovation in farming and rural areas" received the most votes. The event could be linked with the Copa Cogeca award for women farmers. There is also potential complementarity with a relevant call under Horizon (Boosting women-led innovation in farming and rural areas) that has just been closed and where projects are expected in a few months.

The event should explore problems that female entrepreneurs encounter in farming/when innovating. The participants saw also the need to discuss the enabling factors for women to innovate. At the same time it was mentioned that the event shouldn't be limited only to women-farmers, but should be open to all women-innovators in rural areas (an example of women who come back to rural areas after studying/working in the city and not owning land).

According to the participants, the event should take the form of a workshop. The bigger event was suggested as the topic is a novelty for EIP-AGRI and it would be good to allow for broad participation to enable exchange and networking among female rural entrepreneurs. The workshop should also be accompanied with field visits to present practical examples of innovations led by women.

Another topic discussed in round 1 was number 31 "Sustainable and innovative family farming". The participants thought this event could explore the definition of family farming and problems related to running family farms (often these farms are not very modern, small-scale, and run by elderly farmers – it was however noted that some issues relevant to family farms were already covered by the

workshop on small farms). The objective would be to look for diversification opportunities for family farms.

The other topic with many votes in round 2 was number 32 “From consumers to farmers”. The participants initially suggested the topic would be a theme of a new Focus Group. It could explore ways of strengthening the links and trust between consumers and farmers. The participants discussed a possibility for a Focus Group to look at differences between MS for example when it comes to obligations put on farmers to inform the consumers about their products and explore to what extent such information influences consumers’ choices.

At the end, the participants agreed the topic is very complex and broad as it also covers emotional, economical and psychological factors. The participants were also not sure it’s the right topic for a networking activity (they thought it would be better for a research or a study) and wondered what value it would bring. Finally, the group decided it’s too early for an event of that kind and that more data and research would be needed.

## Session AOB & News from the Subgroup members

This session was dedicated to the exchange on relevant ongoing and planned activities and events in the MSs and so Subgroup members were invited to take the floor to share relevant activities they were involved in or knew about. This is the collection of activities that were shared:

- Leonie Göbel (German NSU/NRN) invited Subgroup members to participate in the workshop on Operational Groups (OGs) that will take place in 7-8 September 2022 (working language is German, with the possibility of translation);
- Pawel Krzeczunowicz (Polish NSU/NRN) commented on the presentation of Antonia Gamez Moreno, about the part on OG statistics, and explained that there are more than 49 OGs in Poland. Currently, almost 200 OGs have signed their contracts and 106 OGs have been awarded funding but did not sign their contracts yet. Most of these OGs deal with short supply chains. Additionally, there is another call for OGs that is open until the 29<sup>th</sup> of June and already 300 - 500 applications have been received / are expected. Other than this, there are a couple of summits that are planned with the aim of fostering the exchange and dissemination of OG results: the first one is planned for 13-14 June 2022, dedicated to OGs working on short supply chains (the managing authority, sanitary and food security authorities and Horizon NCP were invited), and the second one will take place in the autumn;
- Mark Redman (Euromontana) provided some updates about the Horizon 2020 project ‘LIAISON’: the project will soon end and some outputs are being finalised such as practical 'how to' guides on various topics (e.g., on partnerships, achieving impact, etc.). Mark also highlighted the commitment of the project to the production of multilingual outputs - the materials are translated into English, French, German, Spanish and Italian, as well as Polish, Hungarian, Romanian and Bulgarian;
- Annemiek Canjels (Province Limburg, Netherlands) reported on the current situation of OGs in the Netherlands: Netherlands received 55 million euro from the EU recovery and resilience



budget for the CAP, and 15 million euro was allocated to new OGs. The application process was short, applicants had to submit strategic proposals within 5 topics - digitalisation, new business models, short supply chains, nitrogen reduction and sectoral initiatives for a sustainable production. There were many good proposals, but not enough budget to support all of them. Annemiek suggested that EIP-AGRI SF invites them to networking activities and stimulate them to look at the EIP-AGRI website;

- Maria Centeno (Portuguese NSU/NRN) explained that Portugal received about the same amount as the Netherlands (close to 49 million euros for the CAP), to spend until 2025. Part of this budget was allocated to research, development and innovation projects (similar to OGs but with different characteristics) and 11 calls were open throughout the year. These calls were organised with simplified cost options. Farmers like this approach, because the invoicing is much easier - it is a good practice. Maria also referred to a national summit that will take place in the 2<sup>nd</sup> semester of 2022, involving 113 OGs, projects supported by the Portuguese NRN and also multi-actor projects financed by other funds. The event will last 2 days: the first day will include plenary sessions and field visits, and on the second day there will be a tech demonstration and a competition (young people studying tech in the agricultural business will form 6 teams that will compete and provide solutions for farmers; there will be a 'shark tank' with representatives of banks who, if interested, can decide to finance any of the competitors). All SOI members are invited to participate in the summit;
- Helena PÄRENSON (Estonian Managing Authority) announced a conference "Circular bio-economy safeguarding the sustainable food systems" (working title) which will be held in Tartu, Estonia on 15 October 2022. The conference will have a practical and scientific perspective.

## Session Next steps and closing

Hugo Almeida, Deputy Head of Unit D.1 Rural areas and networks (DG AGRI), closed the meeting by thanking all the Subgroup members for their active participation and for sharing their experiences and ideas. He considered this 22<sup>nd</sup> subgroup meeting an enriching experience and expressed his gratitude to colleagues from DG AGRI and EIP-AGRI SF involved in the preparation of the meeting.

A save-the-date for the 23<sup>rd</sup> meeting of the Subgroup on Innovation will be soon sent to all Subgroup members.

**The agenda of the meeting and all presentations can be found on the [EIP-AGRI website](#).**