

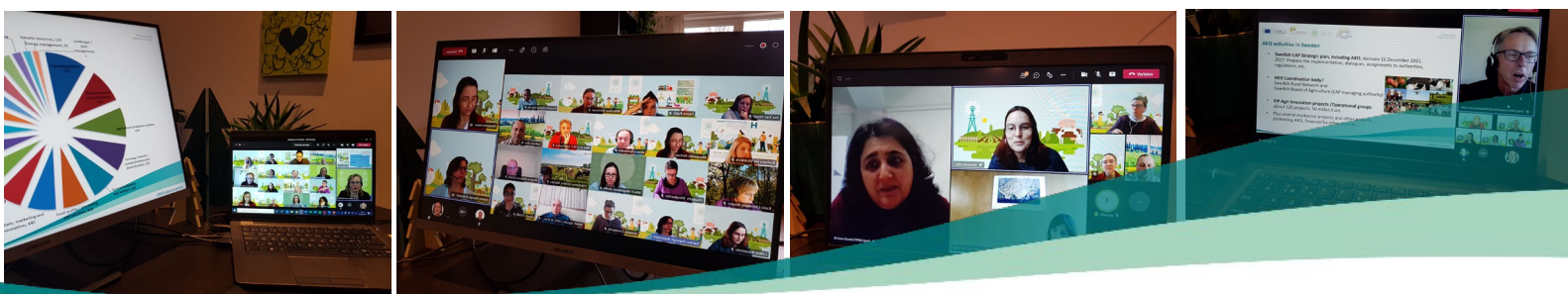


Subgroup on Innovation for agricultural productivity and sustainability

20th Meeting
Online meeting

14 December 2021

REPORT



The Subgroup on Innovation (Sol) met for the twentieth time – online – on 14 December 2021.

The objectives of the meeting were:

- a) to present an update on past and upcoming EIP-AGRI networking activities;
- b) to discuss the topics for networking activities focusing on the second semester of 2022.

Welcome, introduction and networking

Introduction by DG AGRI

Kerstin Rosenow, Head of Research and Innovation Unit B.2 DG-AGRI, welcomed the Subgroup members and presented the latest updates on relevant developments. You can find her [presentation here](#).

She informed the participants that the new Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) is formally approved and will enter into force on 1/1/2023. The Member States (MS) need to formally submit their CAP Strategic Plans to the European Commission (EC) by the 1st of January 2022. DG AGRI constantly works with MS to reinforce EIP-AGRI within AKIS and there is a long list of potential AKIS interventions that MS can fund under the CAP.

Then Kerstin Rosenow provided an update on the number of Operational Groups (OGs) approved per MS: Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, Germany and France are in the lead, but many other countries are catching up. The number of OGs is growing every day and OGs continue to work on a wide range of innovations and themes.

On the Horizon side DG AGRI is currently developing the Work Programme for 2023-2024. Within this programme the EC is planning to create synergies with MSs and Associated Countries through R&I partnerships in 3 priority areas: agroecology, animal health and welfare, and agriculture of data.

The EC has launched on 17/11/2021 a new EU Soil Strategy for 2030. Together with the JRC's EU Soil Observatory and the EU mission: 'A Soil Deal for Europe', there is now an effective framework to foster soil protection and restoration. Kerstin Rosenow also informed that the first call for proposals under the mission in the area of Soil health and food was closed on 20/10/2021 with proposals being now under evaluation. The update of the Horizon Europe Mission Work Programme 2021 will be published on 22/12/2021 and the deadline for submission of new proposals will be the end of March 2022. The publication of the Mission Work Programme 2022 is planned for the end of April 2022.

The Action Plan for the development of organic production in the EU has also been published this year. It will help MSs stimulate both supply and demand for organic products. It will also support the EU Green Deal target to reach at least 25% of the EU's agricultural land under organic farming by 2030. The EC wants a significant increase in organic agriculture. The Action Plan and the new eco-schemes under the CAP will contribute to this. The Action Plan will also be supported by R&I: 30% of the budget for R&I on agriculture, forestry and rural areas is for topics specific or relevant to the organic sector.

Session I: EIP-AGRI networking activities

1.1. EIP-AGRI seminar 'Turning forest innovation into practice'

Beatriz Guimarey Fernandez (EIP-AGRI SF) provided the Subgroup members with some feedback on the seminar "Turning forest innovation into practice" that took place on 24 and 25 November 2021. She explained that, since the seminar took place quite recently, its results are still being analysed and final conclusions are still being drawn. You can find her presentation [here](#) and all the information on the seminar [here](#).

The seminar aimed to look at the role of social innovation in supporting sustainable forest management, with a focus on the strengthening of the Forest Knowledge and Innovation Systems through knowledge exchange. The specific objectives were: stimulate cooperation and uptake of innovation, bridging knowledge and practise, contributing to research agendas and implementation of the new EU forest strategy 2030, as well as stimulating the setting-up of new initiatives. The seminar had 180 participants from 21 Member States but also from other countries (i.e., UK and Serbia), and various types of projects were represented such as OGs and projects funded by Horizon 2020, LIFE, Interreg, Erasmus and LEADER LAGs.

Beatriz Guimarey Fernandez presented some of the seminar's highlights and preliminary outcomes:

1- supportive actors and factors for forest management

Forests provide many opportunities, but they are not isolated systems. There are a lot of different kinds of actors inside and outside the forest sector. There is a clear need for integrated approaches and views. The best innovations are based on regional scale/have regional roots. There is a need for common ground between all the different actors, creating shared visions that work economically.

2- key steps in innovation processes

Define goals that relate to common needs of actors and refer to local/regional needs. Connect with stakeholders and learn: all the different actors need to be welcome, as they can all contribute. An innovation that is regional or locally based cannot be directly transferred to other places, it needs to be adapted to local contexts and to people and their needs. Develop a clear plan and a convincing vision: a successful common vision needs to convince and/or motivate people.

3- key measures in innovation processes

Three key measures can be highlighted: (1) Provision of information and learning, (2) Financing and (3) Institutional structures. Regarding financing, a small amount of money can do a lot when starting up innovative projects, e.g. it allows people with ideas to connect to other partners, or find training or advisory services. Financial support in the long term is also important because the uptake of innovation takes time. Institutional structures are a second type of support to innovation in the longer term, which is relevant for keeping innovation alive and to turn it into practice.

The seminar included a brokerage session, where participants decided on the topics they wanted to discuss with potential partners of future activities.

Q&A - Beatriz Guimarey Fernandez

- **Q:** You mentioned training for advisors. Do you think it needs to be specific for the forest sector or could there be synergies with training for innovation in agriculture?
- **A:** Specific training for forest advisors is welcome, but as said, forests are not isolated systems and cooperation with farmers/agriculture was mentioned several times during the seminar, in the sense that it's important to increase the links and the dialogue between the two sectors. Therefore, synergies between forest and agriculture are very welcome in all aspects, including training.

1.2. EIP-AGRI workshop 'Farm data for better farm performance'

Sergiu Didicescu (EIP-AGRI SF) informed the SOI members that the outcomes of the workshop 'Farm data for better farm performance' are still being processed since the event took place very recently, on 9-10 December 2021. You can find his presentation [here](#) and all the information on the workshop [here](#).

The objectives of the workshop were to take stock of ongoing successful projects and initiatives in the area of farm-generated data, to explore the role of different stakeholders in processes of farm data collection and use at farm level, and to provide an environment to exchange best practices on farm data (collection, use and sharing). The workshop had 108 participants from 22 Member States, and a few from other countries. Most participants were involved in an innovative project such as OGs or projects funded through Horizon 2020, LIFE, Interreg, Erasmus or national/regional funding.

The programme consisted of three main parts:

1- Setting the scene

After a general introduction to the topic, 6 farm data projects and initiatives were presented. Conversation between the speakers was sparked in a panel discussion, and participants could ask questions.

The session was followed by a breakout session focusing on opportunities and challenges regarding farm data use. Highlights from the breakout session included:

- The awareness among farmers regarding the possibilities and benefits of using farm data for the benefit of their own farm is usually uneven, depending on the region, age, farm size etc;
- Data-driven applications must show tangible results and a clear return on investment to farmers. These are key elements for getting farmers on board. There are also non-monetary values to take into consideration for convincing farmers;
- Data interpretation systems and services are needed to turn data into information and subsequently into action. Farmers may be aware that their technology is generating data sets, but often the interpretation of the raw data is difficult. Data interpretation can be delivered by independent objective advisory services.

In addition, breakout groups discussed two other points: (1) the challenges that farmers are facing for the uptake and deployment of data-based solutions and services and (2) for which other actors can farm data be valuable and how.

2- Farm data project market

This session started with the presentation of 27 projects in breakouts, organised according to 3 thematic areas - animal production, arable crops and permanent crops. Inspired by these projects, participants were then invited to join an 'open space' session, where they could propose and host topics for discussion. As a result, 9 groups were organised based on the ideas that were put forward. Their outcomes will be published in the final report.

3- Farm data solutions and needs

The last part of the workshop included a breakout session focusing on how data solutions can support farmers to enhance their performance.

Q&A - Sergiu Didicescu

- **Q:** What are the most needed skills for a better use of data in the farming sector? How can they be trained in an accepted way?
- **A:** Numerous applications (software solutions, machinery generated data etc.) are spawning everywhere in the landscape and trying to interpret data. It is difficult for farmers to keep track of what is offered to them. An important skill to develop is having the right focus on all the solutions offered for enhancing farm performance. The solutions need to be focused and easily visualised, whether it is enhancing economic performance or sustainability performance.

1.3. New EIP-AGRI Focus Groups

Willemine Brinkman (EIP-AGRI SF) gave an update on the new EIP-AGRI Focus Groups. You can find her presentation [here](#).

She started by thanking the SOI members for their inputs on topics for the 3 upcoming EIP-AGRI Focus Groups (FGs). The inputs were used to draft the text of the call for expression of interest for FGs' experts. The draft call text was shared with SOI members and they were invited to provide comments.

The call for the FGs was published on 23 November 2021. The three topics are as follows: FG 44 - Sustainable ways to reduce the use of pesticides in pome and stone fruit production, FG 45 - Digital tools for sustainable nutrient management, FG 46 - Water: Nature-based Solutions for water management under climate change.

The call closes on the 11th of January and the SOI members were asked to further disseminate the FG call among their networks. The first meeting of the FGs will be in March and the second in June. Considering the Covid situation, it was not yet possible to say if the meetings will be held live or online.

Q&A – Willemine Brinkman:

- **Q:** PAN Europe contested some of the wording of the call for Focus Group 44 on 'Sustainable ways to reduce the use of pesticides in pome and stone fruit production' and asked to know how the final wording for this call was made, and who identified the specific questions to look into.
- **A:** All SOI members were invited to add comments to the draft call text through the collaborative area of the SOI. They had one week to do so. Unfortunately, the comments from PAN Europe weren't delivered through this communication channel, and so they weren't

noted in time before the call had to be finalised. Nevertheless, part of the inputs from PAN Europe that were shared during the last SOI meeting were included in the call (i.e. looking back at older practices as possible solutions). All Focus Groups have similar specific questions looking into good practices, barriers and opportunities, ideas for innovative projects and research needs from practice.

- **Q:** What type of participants are you looking for? How to better involve advisors and farmers in FG?
- **A:** We want to have varied types of actors, so indeed we are also looking for farmers and advisors. Your help is welcome to disseminate the call among advisors, and please ask them to also encourage farmers. We want the input from the practical side.

- **Q:** Do you have an idea of how many applications you already have?
- **A:** There were 29 applications on 13 December 2021.

Session II: Shaping networking activities for the second semester of 2022

2.1. Ideas for networking activities for the second half of 2022

Magdalena Mach (DG AGRI) presented the ideas for the EIP-AGRI networking activities for the 2nd half of 2022. You can find her presentation [here](#).

Magdalena Mach recalled that at the Subgroup meeting in September the topics for the forestry seminar, the farm data workshop and three FGs were elaborated. She announced that in the first half of 2022, in addition to the above, there will also be a workshop on organic farming aiming to contribute to the EC Organic Action Plan. SOI members will be consulted about the workshop's concept at a later stage. She also explained that as there is still no programme for the 2nd semester of 2022, it was decided to focus on it today.

Magdalena Mach presented 8 topics that were shortlisted after an in-depth analysis of ideas coming from different sources - e.g., previous SOI discussions, inputs from the network collected through the EIP-AGRI website, gaps analysis looking for topics that haven't been sufficiently tackled yet in previous events (you can find her presentation [here](#)). All topics were put together in the booklet that was sent to SOI members prior to the meeting (you can find the booklet [here](#)).

As the proposed topics are quite broad, Magdalena Mach asked the Subgroup members for their help in narrowing them down during the interactive breakout sessions.

2.2. Discussion in breakout groups

Margarida Ambar (EIP-AGRI SF) presented the process for the interactive discussions, explaining that their aim was to discuss and sharpen the possible angle, scope and objectives of the proposed topics.

The Subgroup members were divided into 4 breakout rooms. In each room, 2 topics were discussed:

- Room 1: AKIS implementation + International and cross-border collaboration
- Room 2: Position of farmers in the food supply chain + Supply chain & bioeconomy
- Room 3: Soil - EU Mission: A Soil Deal for Europe + Farm climate action plans
- Room 4: Farmland abandonment and land restoration for farming + Young innovative entrepreneurs in rural areas

The proposals for networking activities were discussed in two rounds, followed by their reporting back in plenary, and a prioritisation exercise.

The main questions in the breakouts were:

1. Which could be the specific/ concrete angle to tackle within this topic?
2. What would be the objective(s) of the networking activity?

The following highlights from each breakout group were shared in plenary, during the reporting back session:

- ✓ **AKIS implementation in MS:** The proposed topic was considered to be very relevant. The activity could focus on creating further awareness and clarification on the AKIS concept, strategies and its practical implementation at regional/local level, with knowledge exchange on good practices. It was suggested that the topic could be organised in the form of a series of workshops.
- ✓ **International and cross-border collaboration:** The breakout groups mentioned the importance of helping MSs to build a supportive environment for transnational and cross border exchange, and to facilitate matchmaking. It could be an event to both build capacity and to exchange knowledge. The event could be focused on learning from existing initiatives like Interreg, Erasmus Plus, Leader/LAGs and from previous EIP-AGRI initiatives. In respect to the matchmaking possibility, it was mentioned that the event could be organised to support networking between projects or to help potential project partners to meet prior to a call for project funding.
- ✓ **Position of farmers in the food supply chain:** The discussions focused mainly on organising production and territorial planning for the supply chain, the use of digital platforms, and different legal arrangements in various MS. While the design of digital platforms should be locally based, farmers need to be more involved in co-designing digital platforms for food supply chains. It is relevant to take in consideration the scale of businesses (for instance, when small scale businesses are involved in a supply chain, they may have better growth possibilities). Matchmaking events are proposed, sharing good practices to bridge expertise.
- ✓ **Supply chain and bioeconomy:** Many farmers are still not aware of what bioeconomy is. There is a need to share examples of good practices on how farmers can diversify. A suggestion was to focus on opportunities linked to climate change challenges, such as for example carbon credits businesses, or carbon management opportunities. It was proposed to involve policy

makers in this discussion since many are not yet so familiar with / engaged in bioeconomy concepts. Suggested activities included a seminar, field visits or a brokerage event combined with cross visits, mapping bioeconomy for new services and products.

- ✓ **Soil - EU Mission: A Soil Deal for Europe:** There is a need for more clarity regarding synergies and complementarities between the EU soil strategy and the soil mission, and other initiatives in Europe, including the national level. There is a need for a high-level explanation of the vision, synergies and complementarities between those initiatives.

The event could focus on enhancing soil fertility. Another important topic proposed was the soil monitoring, and how to organize this at an affordable cost for farmers.

Several ideas for activities were presented, such as an event to facilitate exchange between OGs and other innovative projects on the topic, cross-border visits and visits to demonstration and lighthouse farms, ensuring that there is exchange between participating projects. It was also suggested to facilitate the participation of OGs in Horizon projects.

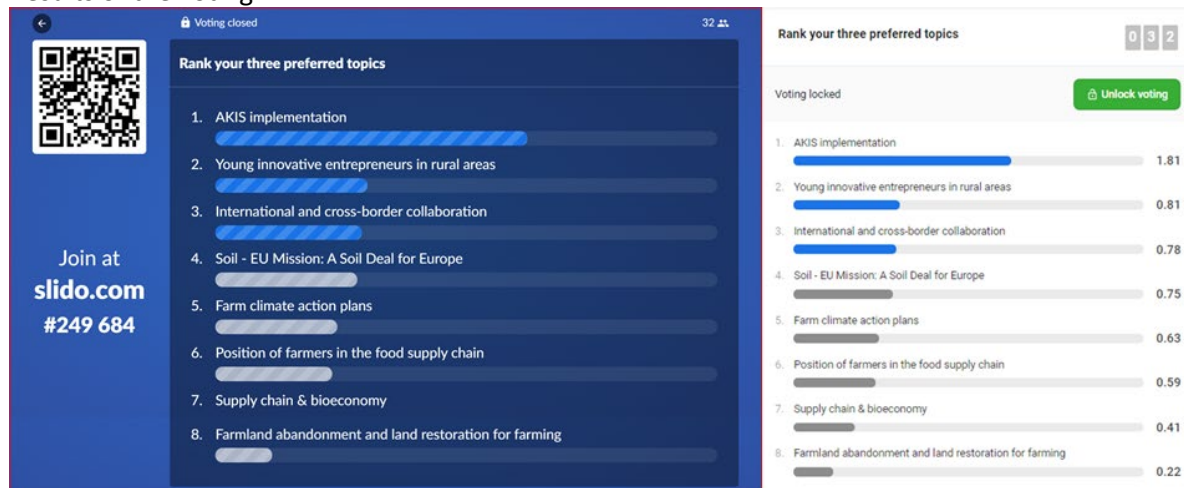
- ✓ **Farm climate action plans:** This is a new topic. There are initiatives starting to appear which concentrate on the reduction of emissions at farm level and on how to put in practice climate adaptation measures. There is a need for farm tools to support these plans. Since it is something new, a networking activity could focus on how farm climate action plans could look like / be done, and to learn from each other, exchanging knowledge and identifying good practices. It could be either an event and /or cross visits.
- ✓ **Farmland abandonment and land restoration for farming:** the networking event could focus on exchanging different approaches or inspirational practices to avoid farmland abandonment and land restoration: sustainable livestock production, tourism, forestry, etc. It could also identify practices, factors or conditions needed to attract (young) people, such as for example social factors, connectivity, networking opportunities, etc. The topic could be linked to the EU forest strategy, the soil mission, Horizon projects, and to the EIP-AGRI FG on animal production.
- ✓ **Young innovative entrepreneurs in rural areas:** This topic could be tackled in connection with the entrepreneurial ecosystem, exploring which support is available / needed, including advisory services and different options within AKIS. A specific angle that could be taken into consideration are female entrepreneurs. The networking activity could focus on exchanging inspirational practices and ideas, and help building entrepreneurial networks and the necessary support. It should provide concrete examples from the field to foster practical know-how exchange.

More details on the ideas, examples and proposals discussed in the breakout groups can be found in [Annex 1](#).

2.3. Voting exercise

Margarida Ambar (EIP-AGRI SF) invited the Subgroup members to participate in a voting exercise, with the aim to prioritise networking activities for the 2nd semester 2022.

Results of the voting:



The top 3 topics that received the most votes were:

1. AKIS implementation
2. Young innovative entrepreneurs
3. International and cross-border collaboration

This was followed by the following:

4. Soil-EU Mission
5. Farm Climate action plans
6. Position for farmers in the food supply chain
7. Supply chain & bioeconomy

News from the SOI members

AKIS in Sweden – Johan Ascard

Johan Ascard (coordinator of the Swedish Rural Network) shared some of the activities that are being put in place to support AKIS implementation in Sweden. You can find his presentation [here](#).

He informed that more information on the state of play and content of the Swedish CAP Strategic Plan would become available on 16 December 2021. Sweden doesn't have an official AKIS coordination body yet. The Swedish Rural Network and Managing Authority are taking up this role for now. The RN established an AKIS group with 14 people from different backgrounds and organisations, with the aim of promoting AKIS, cooperation and knowledge exchange, connecting actors and creating synergies with other strategies and networks. An AKIS conference was organised in March 2021 to discuss what AKIS is, how the Swedish AKIS looks like, the existing resources, existing networks, platforms, etc. This will be followed by a conference in March 2022.

Within the RN, there is an EIP-AGRI Innovation Support team since 2015, with 4 experts to help stakeholders start an OG, or to establish cooperation with other actors in Europe. They have also hired an AKIS coach as from December 2021, who works proactively to promote AKIS.

Johan finished his presentation with some links for whoever wants to know more about AKIS and EIP-AGRI in Sweden.

Q&A – Johan Ascard

- **Q:** How many OGs are there in Sweden, in the current period?
- **A:** About 120 to date, and there is still funding available to start more OGs next year.

- **Q:** We discussed the importance of cross-border visits to exchange knowledge and to prepare for cross-border OGs. Is it foreseen in your CAP plan? As an intervention or by funding of the CAP Network?
- **A:** In the next days there will be more information about the Swedish CAP Strategic Plan, I'm not able to answer now.

- **Q:** What was the influence that the I2Connect H2020 project had on the AKIS in Sweden?
- **A:** I don't know yet. I2Connect is a project to improve the advisory services. I can't tell yet if there is a strong connection.

- **Q:** OGs now cover all thematic areas. It is expected to see more OGs. Will Sweden continue to focus OGs on agricultural and forestry issues, or on broader topics?
- **A:** The CAP Strategic Plan is still under construction, so it's too early to say. Information will only be available after 16 December.

Other activities shared by SOI members

- Krzysztof Janiak (Agricultural Advisory Center in Brwinów, Poland) briefly shared some updates from Poland. The discussion on the CAP Strategic Plan has finished and is now awaiting approval to be sent to the EC. In Poland there is a strong system of public advisors (agricultural advisors, forestry advisors, for rural areas), where advisory centres are responsible for a network of innovation brokers. In terms of institutional development, a lot has already been done but there

is still a need to change in terms of attitudes, skills and habits, and on how advisors should be trained. Technical skills need to be improved. The AKIS system will be built with great involvement of advisors. There are now more than 100 OGs in Poland and the NRN is organising networking meetings. It is expected that next year there will be new call for OGs that will focus on short supply chains;

- Karin Ellermann-Kugler (Association of Chambers of Agriculture, Germany) mentioned that there will be an online event for the German speaking community on rural development and CAP-related aspects in January. More info on Forum 8 and 10 of this conference [here](#);
- Annemiek Canjels (Province of Limburg, the Netherlands) shared information about the participation of colleagues from the Dutch NRN in the Horizon project MODERN AKIS, for which close cooperation with the EIP Support Facility is crucial.

Next steps and closing

Nicola-Britta Holsten (DG-AGRI) closed the meeting by thanking all the Subgroup members for their contribution and for sharing their ideas. DG AGRI and the EIP-AGRI SF will analyse all inputs from the meeting and propose the topics for networking activities for the second half of 2022.

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

ANNEX 1

Results of the discussion in breakout groups on potential topics for future EIP-AGRI networking activities

Subgroup members were divided into 4 breakout rooms. In each room, 2 topics were discussed:

- Room 1: [AKIS implementation](#) + [International and cross-border collaboration](#)
- Room 2: [Position of farmers in the food supply chain](#) + [Supply chain & bioeconomy](#)
- Room 3: [Soil - EU Mission: A Soil Deal for Europe](#) + [Farm climate action plans](#)
- Room 4: [Farmland abandonment and land restoration for farming](#) + [Young innovative entrepreneurs in rural areas](#)

The ideas for potential networking activities were discussed in smaller breakout groups (in two rounds). This Annex contains the results of the discussions in breakouts, organised per topic.

The main questions for the discussions in breakouts were:

1. Which could be the specific/ concrete angle to tackle within this topic?
2. What would be the objective(s) of the networking activity?

1. AKIS implementation

A clear understanding of AKIS is needed, as well as the measures that support AKIS implementation. How can EIP-AGRI help to further clarify?

In the previous programming period there were a lot of networking activities to support NRNs in becoming active in the EIP network. Currently MSs are presenting their CAP SP to the EC, but not everything is clear about NRNs role in AKIS, or on what an AKIS should look like. Therefore, NRNs need more info and support on two aspects: (1) better understanding on AKIS and (2) RNs role in AKIS.

For the advisory community, AKIS is quite complicated, even more in (some) regionalized MSs such as Germany, where the responsibility on education and advice is on the regional level. AKIS is not fully understood at the regional and local level. Knowledge exchange is important, and the different aspects need to be brought closer to the target groups.

A lot of work needs to be done at regional level, awareness is needed, and regional structures need to be established for knowledge building and exchange.

A lot of people think that the EIP network is the same as AKIS. There's some knowledge about AKIS at a general level but not in the details, e.g. on what should be the relation between AKIS and the EIP network. Indeed, the strategy behind AKIS is not always understood. It's not only networking and knowledge flows. It's much more: for instance, different possible interactions such as farm demonstrations, advisors going abroad, etc. The links are still missing. It's not just a few interventions: it's actually a strategy and real actions.

We need to make AKIS real / more concrete, and help MSs and regions to understand the possibilities, the potential multiple outcomes, etc. EIP-AGRI cuts across the entire CAP SP, so it can bring the

message across. The role of EIP is indeed not to tell MSs and regions what to do but, instead, showcase what the potential of AKIS is, so that they know all the possibilities.

There is a need to further explain the strategy and the possibilities that AKIS offers, but also its practical implementation. For instance: what are the AKIS coordinating bodies? In the CAP SP, the EC is asking for a responsible person or unit who will follow up the strategic approach and who will monitor AKIS implementation – this will be the AKIS coordinator / coordinating body. It will probably be a person in a Ministry. That person will also be the contact person for the EC to discuss specific aspects related to AKIS. The idea is that this person can build a kind of AKIS platform around him/her to give him/her the information from the field.

There are a lot of knowledge gaps in the farmer and advisor community and these need to be addressed. Actors need to understand, in clear and practical terms, what AKIS means. Learning about how those gaps are addressed in other MS or regions can be very beneficial: exchange between AKIS Contact Points from different countries could be very interesting.

There is a need for capacity building of different AKIS actors to fully integrate them in their national AKIS. There's no need to start from scratch, but we should build on existing well-functioning systems instead. It is important to show best practices.

Raising awareness and informing groups about AKIS is necessary, specifically new groups or actors that are now not yet working directly on innovation and knowledge exchange. It was suggested to make AKIS more tangible for a wider group of actors. For instance, there's a need to provide a platform to connect people involved in the new Horizon projects. EIP-AGRI could facilitate this in the beginning.

The involvement of the broad Leader community (including LAGs) is lacking: there are interesting good practices and a lot of potential, also on cross-border exchanges.

The networking activity could be a series of workshops.

In conclusion:

- Very relevant topic to address;
- Content- wise: create more awareness, need for information and capacity building on AKIS concept, strategies and its practical implementation at regional/local level, knowledge exchange on good practices;
- Could be a series of workshops.

2. International and cross-border collaboration

It is important to help MSs build a supportive environment for transnational and cross border exchange and facilitate matchmaking.

The easiest way to foster international and cross-border collaboration is through the networks, at regional, national and EU level. For instance, the German network clusters projects' topics and, when there is a demand from OGs on a topic, the network can connect them. This can be a model for cross-border exchange and how it could work. So, networks could be clustering topics where people are really interested in. This could be done at regional level and from there subsequently at the EU level.

Reaching out beyond borders has proved to be most fruitful, but it's not easy. For instance: there's limited information on how to find the right partners in other countries and timing for calls in different MSs need to be taken into consideration.

A supportive environment for transnational and cross border exchange and for brokerage activities (matchmaking) is needed, and MSs need support to set it up.

This is particularly relevant in preparatory phases prior to the establishment of a project (i.e., an OG).

It could be interesting to have an event that brings together different types of initiatives, to see how other projects / programmes foster international and cross-border collaboration and learn from it. It could be an event for both capacity building and to exchange knowledge and information. The event could be focused on learning from existing initiatives like Interreg, Erasmus Plus, Leader/LAGs and from previous EIP-AGRI initiatives (within the EIP-AGRI context there has been already a lot of formal and informal transnational cooperation).

In conclusion:

- Important to help MSs build a supportive environment for transnational and cross border exchange and facilitate matchmaking;
- Learn from existing initiatives like Erasmus +, Interreg, Leader/LAGs and from previous EIP-AGRI initiatives;
- Need for support for projects to find each other or for potential partners to meet (matchmaking) – across borders and internationally;
- The activity could be an event for both capacity building and exchange information.

3. Position of farmers in the food supply chain

Organising logistics in food supply chains can be a challenge particularly for farmers in remote areas, while near big cities can be much easier. Grouping remote farmers could be an innovative way to make them get more involved in food supply chains. This could be an interesting angle to tackle, as it would be relevant to share related good practices.

The use of innovative digital and marketing tools to reach consumers (such as QR codes, labelling, applications for logistics) would be another interesting aspect to tackle. Particularly with a focus on the identification and engagement of relevant advisory providers, many of whom will be new AKIS actors (e.g., private sector IT / business consultants).

Different actors should be involved in co-designing digital platforms.

There's a big demand for digital tools, but what are the necessary skills to enable farmers to make the best use of digital tools in the supply chain?

Digital platforms should be co-designed locally and farmers should be more involved in the design process (they're usually developed by IT experts and young people).

Use of data for business may be an area to develop, but there's a need to take into consideration the scale of the business. There are growth possibilities for small scale businesses when involved in a network / included in a supply chain. The business model for that growth includes integrating digital tools to enable collective supplies.

<https://www.eitfood.eu/projects/food-foresight>

Small local food systems are not so flexible, covid 19 highlighted this.

There's the need to take into consideration existing legislation: there are many on-farm shops and legislation can be too strict for farmers, hampering them from easily selling their products.

The networking activity could be a matchmaking event: this topic offers a great potential for brokerage activities, i.e., proposals for new Thematic Networks (especially the 'new' type of TNs building on OGs).

Sharing examples and good practices could be an added value, bridging expertise. Seeing other experiences could be a way to demonstrate how to organise the supply chain.

In the NL there is currently a call for project funding, inviting farmers and stakeholders to present proposals for improving their market and chain position. The goal is to have fairer prices for sustainably produced food and feed. This call will also be possible in the Dutch CAP Strategic Plan as a sub-measure under cooperation, and it can be a steppingstone towards producer organisation programmes and other sectoral interventions. It is a way to address the CAP's goal on "improving farmers' position in the food chain".

Growing the potential for re-localised supply chains (post covid?) could be an interesting set of discussions that might highlight new innovations and the potential role of CAP in this respect.

In conclusion:

- Share good practices on organising the logistics for farmers in remote areas;
- Farmers need to be more involved in co-designing digital platforms for food supply chains;
- Take in consideration the legislation point of view;
- The networking activity could be a brokerage event.

4. Supply chain and bioeconomy

Although this topic is being addressed by policy, there is an EU bioeconomy strategy, and a number of projects working on it, many farmers do not know what bioeconomy is. Therefore, we need good examples and show how farmers can change their perspective. Sharing good practices could be the most valuable thing for farmers. OGs can help to introduce good practices.

Climate conditions can be a challenge for applying some types of practices - i.e., it is very important to adapt raw materials to weather conditions. Take into account climate conditions when talking about this topic, when discussing transferring practices.

Carbon credit businesses should be developed, carbon management should be developed - show examples from other countries.

Policymakers are not effectively engaging with the bioeconomy concept in many EU countries and consequently AKIS actors are not aware, nor supported, nor guided.

In terms of the networking activity, a seminar could be useful to present good practices through practical examples. Field visits with a multi actor approach could go to specific areas to see, discuss good practices. Matchmaking combined with cross visits could be something to think about. Another activity could be mapping bioeconomy (at several levels) in respect to the provision of new services and new products.

In conclusion:

- Many farmers are still not aware of what bioeconomy is and so sharing examples of good practices is needed, OGs can help introducing good practices;
- Climate conditions can be a challenge for applying some types of practices, they have an impact when considering transferring good practices;
- The networking activity could be a seminar, field visits or brokerage event combined with cross visit.

5. Soil - EU Mission: A Soil Deal for Europe

Soil is a diverse topic depending on regions and countries, thus it's important to tackle issues differently according to regions, and to keep in mind the different types of soil, climate, etc. But it's important to build common understandings and to discuss future visions.

There is a need to identify synergies and complementarities between the EU soil strategy and the EU soil mission, and other initiatives in Europe, including initiatives at national level. A higher-level discussion would be interesting, to work on goals together.

An important question is how to improve soil fertility in different regions/under different conditions, while the main goal is to achieve this challenge together. A potential scope/angle could be on how to ensure and improve soil fertility keeping in mind different conditions.

Monitoring is necessary but expensive, so there is need for innovation in methods used for monitoring. Monitoring solutions that are appreciated in research don't automatically work for farmers.

Regarding the EU soil mission, available knowledge is significant but it's difficult to find the information needed.

An idea could be to develop artificial intelligence to support farmers and practitioners to find essential information or solutions with a scientific foundation.

Ideas for activities:

- Promote the exchange between OGs on soil topics to see what's going on;
- A seminar focusing on the big directions what the soil mission wants to follow, and presenting OGs from all over Europe (videos) combined with a brokerage session which would bring together research with final users of research results and OGs, to prepare proposals together;
- A workshop for researchers;
- A booklet or short videos on OGs working on specific soil topics would be interesting for farmers - prepare and disseminate short and condensed information, highlighting inspiring ideas;
- Visits to lighthouse farms and farm labs;
- A network of lighthouse farms and farm labs: there are good examples of lighthouse farms and farm labs in different countries; technical support to farms is important for the implementation of the soil mission;
- A high-level conference on soil strategy with focus on the 'bigger picture';
- Facilitate the involvement of OGs in Horizon Europe calls;
- Establish a knowledge reservoir to inform about latest and best solutions for soil-related challenges;
- An event for managing authorities (those who organise soil-related calls) on how to achieve higher participation/application;
- When providing examples of good practices / solutions to challenges, it should be done with an emphasis on their practical side as much as possible, i.e., organise field trips, use plain wording, etc.;
- Highlight projects of the network and involve them, identifying synergies between projects, soil mission and different soil partnerships, etc.- use and communicate on synergies/ complementarities.

In conclusion:

- There's a need for a high-level explanation on the vision, synergies and complementarities with other initiatives, such as the EU soil strategy and soil mission, and other initiatives in Europe, including the national level;
- Soil fertility and how to enhance it is a most relevant topic;
- Monitoring is also a key issue;
- Several ideas for activities were presented, such as events and visits to demonstration and lighthouse farms, and the facilitation of the involvement of OGs in Horizon Europe calls.

6. Farm climate action plans

This is a new topic and so initiatives are just starting to appear. It refers to how to reduce emissions at farm level and how to put in practice climate adaptation measures.

In farm climate action plans farmers develop and implement plans to reduce emissions and introduce measures like carbon sequestration and climate mitigation.

There is an active discussion in Latvia on how to develop digital tools to evaluate emissions at farm level, and to analyse how the performance is changing after results have been evaluated. This is important for instance, for dairy farms (aiming at net-zero carbon emissions milk production).

Farm tools need to be further developed, and farms should cooperate with IT enterprises to indicate what the users of the tool need.

A suggestion could be to benchmark initiatives in different areas, not to duplicate efforts but to make use of synergies. But benchmarking is difficult due to different climate and geographical conditions.

It could be an idea to organise an event and /or cross visits to show how OGs work on this topic.

A networking activity could focus on how farm climate action plans can look like / be done, and on learning from each other. It would be relevant to see what the most successful initiatives in terms of the achieved effects are, identifying good practices.

In Germany farms created a climate check system that has also an energy saving aspect (how to save money by reducing energy consumption). Other regions implemented this idea. An economic advisor collaborated and proposed solutions – it's important to merge ecological and economic aspects/benefits.

In conclusion:

- Farm Climate Action Plans are something new;
- Farm tools need to be further developed to support these plans;
- Suggestions for networking activities could be an event and /or cross visits, focusing on knowledge exchange.

7. Farmland abandonment and land restoration for farming

This topic is related to the EU Forest Strategy and the Soil Mission, as well as many Horizon projects, OGs and EIP Focus Groups on animal production.

Land must be managed as a precondition for any function.

One possible course of action could be to restore abandoned land with sustainable open livestock production as a starter (grazed land reduce risk of wildfires), and then further develop tourism, biodiversity, landscape quality.

These are areas that potentially can be used for tourism and/or biodiversity purposes. They may have environmental value (where some species are studied, for instance), landscape relevance.

Shepherds can be involved in restoring farmland as it provides them areas for pasture. So, it may be good to attract/have livestock breeders in these areas.

There are also benefits of livestock to contribute to the restoration of soil health and fertility, which are relevant specially to help restore agricultural production. So, there's also a link to soil, as well.

Short rotation coppice can be used on low quality land or in areas that are not useful for food production.

Not only focus on how to prevent people from leaving the area, but also on how to attract new people to the area, i.e., offer key social factors and connectivity, network activity.

Living labs can help to find solutions ([here](#) a presentation explaining the concept).

In Sweden they have a problem with land abandonment in remote areas - they are trying to stimulate young farmers to stay at the farm. Special attention goes to the restoration of abandoned farmland into arable farm..

In conclusion:

- An idea to tackle this topic could be focusing on restoring farm abandonment land through a series of activities: sustainable open livestock production, tourism, biodiversity, forestry, short rotation coppice;
- There should be a focus not only on how to prevent people from leaving the area, but also on how to attract people;
- This topic has links with the EU forest strategy and soil mission, with OGs and Horizon projects, also with the EIP Focus Group on animal production.

8. Young innovative entrepreneurs in rural areas

This topic could be tackled in connection with the entrepreneurial ecosystem, exploring which support is available / needed, including advisory services and different options within AKIS. For instance, there's a new initiative: start-up forums.

A specific angle that is important to take in consideration are female entrepreneurs. Women-led innovations need to be stimulated (i.e., Copa-Cogeca is organising a yearly innovation award for women farmers - more information [here](#))

An idea can be to help build network(s) with other entrepreneurs, including young farmers and newcomers in rural areas.

Linking young entrepreneurs with young advisors is also relevant.

Internet and transport infrastructures are fundamental to attract / keep young innovative entrepreneurs in rural areas.

There's a need to develop long term strategies to revitalise rural areas, with a broader perspective, considering more than agriculture.

Practice exchange between revitalising areas should be stimulated.

The networking activity could focus on exchanging good practices and ideas, and help building entrepreneurial networks and the necessary support. It should provide concrete examples from the field to foster exchange of practical know-how.

In conclusion:

- Young entrepreneurs: exchange good practices and ideas and build networks;
- Need to connect young innovative entrepreneurs with the entrepreneurial ecosystem and foster practical knowledge exchange. Particularly, link young entrepreneurs with young advisors;
- Need to develop long term and integrated strategies to revitalize rural areas, considering more than agriculture, building businesses, networking with other entrepreneurs, providing good internet and transport infrastructures.