



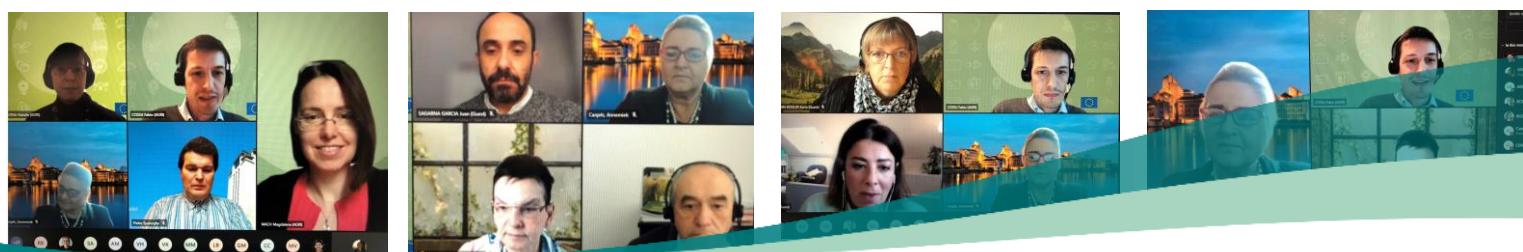
Subgroup on Innovation for agricultural productivity and sustainability

18th Meeting

Online meeting

18 March 2021

REPORT



The Subgroup on Innovation (Sol) met for the eighteenth time – online – on 18 March 2021.

The objectives of the meeting were:

- a) to present the latest developments in Horizon Europe, the next EU research and innovation framework programme and discuss possibilities for strengthening its links with EIP-AGRI;
- b) to consult on the concept of online webinars for the representatives of managing authorities, national rural networks and Horizon Europe national contact points to be carried out in spring 2021 with the aim of sharing experiences and discussing on the support that national CAP networks will provide within the context of CAP strategic plans.

Welcome and introduction

Kerstin Rosenow, Head of Unit DG AGRI B.2, welcomed the Subgroup members and presented the latest updates on CAP and Horizon Europe related matters. You can find her presentation [here](#).

Since the EU institutions reached a political agreement on Horizon Europe on 11 December 2020, Kerstin Rosenow briefly presented the programme's structure and informed the participants about the adoption of the first Horizon Europe Strategic Plan (2021-2024) and the indicative timeline for the publication of the Work Programme (2021-2022). Then she described the current state of play of CAP negotiations (indicative timeline for agreement - first semester 2021) reminding that CAP Strategic Plans will have to be formally submitted by Member States (MSs) to the Commission by 1/1/2022.

Kerstin Rosenow also reported on the public hearing on *Enabling innovation for sustainable agriculture* organised by the European Parliament's Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development that took place on the 16 March 2021. The meeting allowed academics, civil society representatives and practitioners to discuss with Committee Members and the European Commission about different aspects of innovation including the growing role of EIP-AGRI in bringing innovation to the ground.

Regarding the EIP networking and communication activities, Kerstin Rosenow highlighted they still continue regardless of the fact that we entered a transitional period and that the contract with current service provider expired at the beginning of the year. As an example it was mentioned that the EIP newsletter continues to be published each month and that a series of online webinars on the role of CAP networks in the CAP strategic plans implementation is being organised. Kerstin Rosenow also reminded that two events from EIP-AGRI Annual Work Programme 2020, that had to be postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, will take place in March and April. The workshop "Towards carbon neutral agriculture" and the seminar "Healthy soils for Europe: sustainable management through knowledge and practice" will be held online but will keep the interactive character allowing the participants to share their practical experience, knowledge, questions and new ideas.

At the end of her presentation Kerstin Rosenow provided the Sol members with an update on the Operational Groups (OGs). Currently there are 1.656 OGs in the database, and the number is still expected to grow within the current period.

The introductory part of the meeting was concluded with a Q&A session. The following exchange of views focused on the need to combine the ambitious policy objectives with an appropriate level of resources. There is a risk that MSs prioritize the eco-schemes when allocating their CAP resources and that innovation-related interventions receive insufficient, residual funding only. It is essential to “make the innovation voice heard now”. Sol members can play an active role in this regard, by highlighting the benefits that innovation interventions can bring to all the nine CAP specific objectives. Innovation projects and EIP networking can effectively work in combination with other interventions like investments and eco-schemes, and improve their effectiveness with little financial effort.

Session I: Horizon Europe – upcoming opportunities for research projects and strengthening the links with EIP-AGRI

The session started with presentation on Horizon Europe Cluster 6 by Natalia Brzezina, Research Programme Officer from DG AGRI Unit B.2. You can find the presentation [here](#).

Natalia Brzezina started her intervention by reminding the ambitious targets set by the European Green Deal for farmers, foresters and rural communities. Those targets include among others contribution to achieving climate neutrality by 2050, reduction by 50% of the overall use and risk of chemical pesticides by 2030 and achieving at least 25% of the EU's agricultural land under organic farming by 2030.

Research and innovation (R&I) are key sources of new knowledge and solutions enabling and accelerating the progress required to achieve these challenging targets and to transform the way farmers manage land, produce food and respond to changing consumer preferences. Since 2014, DG AGRI has developed and followed a long-term strategic approach to EU agricultural research and innovation which already back then had at its heart the current Commission priorities of the European Green Deal. The AGRI R&I strategy has been implemented through the CAP and the R&I Framework Programme (Horizon 2020) working in close synergy, which until today resulted in more than 2000 EIP-AGRI OGs and over 300 Horizon 2020 projects, including around 200 multi-actor projects.

To ensure that the Green Deal targets and objectives are achieved on time, it is important to step up the R&I efforts. Therefore, there will be almost 9 billion EUR under Horizon Europe, the next R&I Framework Programme, under Cluster 6 for R&I related to food, bioeconomy, natural resources, agriculture and environment. Cluster 6 covers seven Intervention Areas (IA). DG AGRI co-chairs Cluster 6 together with DG RTD and is directly responsible for programming R&I under the IA on agriculture, forestry and rural areas.

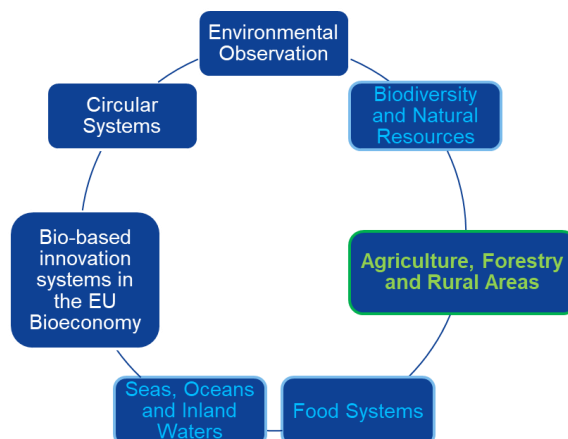


Figure 1. 7 Intervention Areas of Horizon Europe Cluster 6

The Horizon Europe Strategic Plan 2021-24 and Work Programme 2021-22 have been developed through intensive co-creation and cooperation between various DGs and taking into account AGRI's R&I strategy, new scientific evidence and stakeholders views. The long-term expected impacts defined in the Strategic Plan have been the basis for preparing the first Cluster 6 Work Programme (2021-2022) around 7 corresponding "destinations", to which R&I actions developed under various IA of Cluster 6 should lead.

Natalia Brzezina gave also several examples of key R&I priorities for agriculture, forestry and rural areas under each destination mentioning that when it comes to destination fostering 'innovative governance models, environmental observational and digital solutions as enablers', R&I activities will support AKIS and networking within the new CAP, reinforce the multi-actor approach and promote interactive innovation and co-ownership of results by users. This will be of crucial importance as EIP-AGRI, well-functioning AKIS and strong advisory services are needed to achieve the Green Deal objectives and targets.

Given that EU funds only represents 10% of public R&I investments made by Member States, Natalia Brzezina pointed out the importance of fostering synergies with them. Therefore large-scale research and innovation partnerships with Member States and Associated Countries are being prepared as part of the next Work Programme 2023-2024 in the areas of agroecology, animal health and welfare and agriculture of data. European Commission is also strengthening bilateral and multilateral international cooperation on R&I.

Then, Marta Conde Vidal from the Spanish Centre for the Development of Industrial Technology (CDTI) gave an overview of activities undertaken by National Contact Point in Spain during the last 7 years to promote synergies between Horizon 2020 and EIP-AGRI. Her presentation is available [here](#).

Actions in the above field are geared towards joining forces and strengthening collaboration of entities involved in the implementation of Horizon 2020 and the rural development pillar of the CAP. These institutions include on the one side Ministry for Science and Innovation (MICIN), CDTI, the National Institute for Agricultural and Food Research and Technology (INIA) acting as NCP and on the other side the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAPA). Representatives of MAPA participate in H2020 Societal Challenge 2 info-days presenting information on OGs calls whereas officials from MICIN take

part in meetings organised by MAPA. These events constitute also an excellent opportunity for OGs and Horizon projects to exchange experience and discover the possibilities for future collaboration. Bridges are built also by NCP promotional activities aimed at disseminating information on OGs within the research community and by support provided to applicants interested in setting up an OG or in involving an OG in Horizon project.

In this regard, Marta Conde Vidal emphasised how useful the materials prepared by the EIP-AGRI Service Point were for NCP for explaining the EIP concept and multi-actor approach to others. EIP-AGRI networking events and EIP-AGRI website were also mentioned as important sources of knowledge for the scientific community.

Finally, in view of strengthening the links between EIP-AGRI OGs and Horizon projects in the future, Marta Conde Vidal suggested further development of OGs database which would enable more efficient search for projects using various criteria and key words. Researchers should be able to easily identify and contact OGs of interest, which would facilitate their involvement in R&D proposals.

The last presentation in this session was given by Pieter Spanoghe, professor from Ghent University and coordinator of two sister projects EURAKNOS and EUREKA. You can find the presentation [here](#).

Pieter Spanoghe is persuaded that the future of innovation in EU agriculture and forestry is based on the improved (digital) exchange of best practices between farmers, researchers and advisors from different sectors and MS.

Therefore both projects aim at building a “knowledge reservoir” for agricultural innovation. There exist already several digital platforms that allow the exchange of scientific papers. However, the outcomes of Horizon 2020 projects, apart from publications, may also take the form of video/audio podcasts, databases, networks or software. And these are impossible to share through available platforms. What’s more, different categories of stakeholders show interest in different types of materials produced by European projects. For example farmers and foresters tend to be the most interested in videos and factsheets with practical advice. That is why EUREKA and EURAKNOS are working on the 'FarmBook' - a single open source e-platform for collecting and sharing various types of end-user material produced by Horizon 2020 multi-actor projects. A prototype of the 'FarmBook' has been developed linking some of the features of Wikipedia (reliable knowledge that is easily available) and Facebook (posting comments and adding pictures). The platform will be free and will offer an open access to its resources after logging in. It will enable to filter information according to different categories, to translate automatically all materials and to meet other users at the discussion forums.

This part of the meeting was concluded with a Q&A session during which the participants explored more in details the structure of Horizon Europe and Cluster 6. It was clarified that the Strategic Plan outlines long-term expected impacts of R&I that cut across all IAs. These cross-cutting expected impacts have been translated into destinations of the Work Programme. Each IA, including IA on agriculture, forestry and rural areas, contribute to the seven destinations with R&I activities.

When it comes to the expected impact on “Food and nutrition security for all from sustainable food systems” and corresponding destination “Healthy, environment-friendly and fair food systems from primary production to consumption”, it was underlined that EC encourages the transition to

sustainable food systems not only in the EU but also globally. That's why international cooperation within the consortia is encouraged.

There has been a change in terminology with regard to calls. Under Horizon Europe they are understood as all R&I actions with the same deadline for applications and the same mode of evaluation (single or two-stage). Under HE destinations correspond to calls under Horizon 2020 and for example destination on "Resilient, inclusive, healthy and green rural, coastal and urban communities" will correspond to RUR calls from the previous work programme.

Then it was confirmed that as in Horizon 2020 farmers can participate in Horizon Europe consortia of multi-actor projects and be reimbursed for their work and the costs they will incur in relation to their involvement in the R&I projects.

The R&I activities supported under HE include all types of farms and farming systems. However, in relation to digital aspects special attention will be paid to small-scale farms.

It was also clarified that the FarmBook is being currently filled in with data and information coming from research institutes but that in the future partners from European and national projects will also be able to upload their materials to the platform. All the inputs will pass through a filter of quality in the form of comments and votes provided by platform users.

For MS wishing to build their national FarmBooks, it was recommended to use the experience of EURAKNOS and EUREKA projects and contact their coordinators in case of questions.

Session II: Online webinars "Preparing the CAP Strategic Plan – the role of innovation networking in the Member States" – concept and programme

Session II focused on the new EIP networking initiative to be carried out in the form of online webinars in spring 2021 with the aim of sharing experiences and discussing on the support that national CAP networks will provide within the context of CAP strategic plans. The session consisted of a brief introduction by DG AGRI followed by voting exercise and an interactive discussion.

2.1. Introduction

Antonella Zona (DG AGRI) started the introduction by explaining the objective of the session, which was to ask for Sol's help in identifying the most important issues for MSs preparing to set up national CAP networks, and their innovation strand in particular. You can find her presentation [here](#).

Antonella Zona reminded that Commission in the CAP strategic plans recommendations highlighted the crucial role of CAP networks in contributing to achieving the new CAP cross cutting objective of modernising agriculture and rural areas by strengthening the national Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) and developing links with the research policy under Horizon Europe and other national instruments. Some aspects of the innovation strand of the CAP network were already addressed at the last meeting of the Subgroup. The topic was also discussed during the EIP seminar 'CAP Strategic Plans: the key role of AKIS in Member States' in September 2020 and at the 19th NRN meeting organised by the ENRD in February 2021. However, there is a need for further exchanges that will provide additional practical support to MS.

Therefore DG AGRI plans to organise a series of 3 online webinars in June 2021 with the involvement of all 27 MS divided in 3 groups. The invitees would include representatives of managing authorities, national rural networks, advisory services and Horizon national contact points.

The objectives of the webinars will be to:

1. raise awareness about the role of the CAP networks' innovation strand,
2. develop common understanding of the CAP networks' innovation strand,
3. help build the capacity of the national CAP networks,
4. exchange practical experience (mutual learning) between the key actors that will be involved with the CAP networks in each MS,
5. harvest this practical experience and make it available for all key actors in the MS.

Basing on the discussions in the last year seminar on AKIS and previous Sol meeting, DG AGRI identified 5 themes to be discussed at the webinars:

1. What is the role of the future national CAP networks and their innovation strand in particular in AKIS coordination, including the interaction with the AKIS co-ordination bodies?
2. How can CAP networks and their innovation strand in particular help facilitate the effective integration of all advisory providers (public and private) into the national AKIS?
3. How can CAP networks and their innovation strand in particular support the better functioning of new and existing Innovation Support Services within the national AKIS, in particular ISS working at local/regional level?
4. What can CAP networks and their innovation strand in particular do to create and strengthen linkages between Horizon Europe and EIP implementation at national level?
5. What support for the networking of Operational Groups should CAP networks and their innovation strand in particular provide at national and cross-border level?

Antonella Zona concluded her presentation indicating that next step in the preparations would require prioritising the above themes and defining the subthemes for each of them.

The participants welcomed the webinars' concept with interest agreeing on the need to raise awareness among MS about the role and the potential of future CAP networks and their innovation strand in particular. It was also mentioned that the webinars in order to be successful in providing support should be based on the most urgent needs. These shall include, inter alia, ensuring adequate preparation of advisers to their new tasks in the area of supporting innovation or the assistance that the networks can offer in the implementation of new environmental measures. Prioritisation is extremely needed as webinars cannot address all topics.

Some concerns were raised about the effectiveness of AKIS functioning in MS where the unit managing EIP is not the same as the unit responsible for the rural network. The challenges of such situation could be overcome through some reorganisation. Such reorganisation is already happening in several MS, however, as the examples of Flanders and Germany show, it is not always necessary. Functioning of AKIS and proper knowledge flows could also be ensured by improving the collaboration of these units (hence the importance of an AKIS coordination body).

2.2. Interactive voting exercise

After Antonella Zona's presentation, the members of the Subgroup were invited to rank, in order of importance, the webinars' discussion themes proposed by DG AGRI.

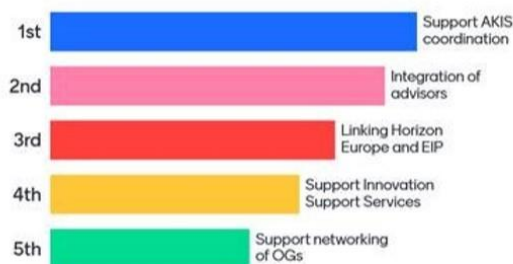


Figure 2. Results of the prioritisation exercise

Then the participants were asked if any important practical discussion theme was still missing. The results of voting indicate the webinars could also deal with the following aspects:

- inclusion of the 1st pillar,
- specific challenges of regionalised MS,
- Q&A session on programming,
- ongoing collection of AKIS actors' specific needs,
- avoidance of the multiplication of similar practice knowledge reservoirs and interconnectivity of existing ones,
- fair financing of all stakeholders,
- impact on farmers,
- cooperation with farmers with the focus on their needs,
- best practices on how to coordinate AKIS,
- peer sharing (advisors, farmers),
- linking Horizon Europe and OGs,
- improving advisory services for farmers,
- strategies for involving private companies in AKIS,
- interactions of AKIS stakeholders.

2.3. Interactive discussion session

The input from the voting served then as a basis for the interactive discussion. This part of the meeting was about developing further the concept and content of the webinars basing on the prioritization exercise. The ideas were collected in the google doc and then further discussed in plenary. The main question of this session was:

- For 3 discussion themes identified as the most important please write down subtopics and examples of good practices (from your MS/other MS) that should be covered under each theme. Any additional suggestions for that discussion theme?

Under the theme related to **supporting AKIS coordination**, points deepened during the discussion in plenary included inter alia the challenges that the regionalised countries are facing building national AKIS. It was highlighted that proper coordination at national level will require bringing different AKIS actors together, exchanging knowledge and experience (that's where the webinars can be useful) and respecting the competences of the regions.

Then the need for developing bigger interoperability of data and digital systems was mentioned. This concept has several different dimensions and involves promotion of data exchange via interoperable platforms between MS. Interoperability is important for managing authorities e.g. in fulfilling their CAP reporting obligations and for advisors whose work efficiency would significantly increase if they had access to systems gathering and updating the results of all individual projects. In this regard the webinars could also look for ways in which national CAP networks could support wider application of most recent digital tools by farmers and advisors.

In relation to the theme related to **CAP networks and integration of advisors**, the webinars could explore how to use regional knowledge exchange platforms to connect advisers and practitioners and how to involve networks in providing training opportunities for advisors. A system gathering private and public advisors that is being built in the Netherlands could also serve as a good practice to be shared with other MS. It's based on advisors working on 1st pillar's measures but it's systematically adding others to the contact base so that the farmers have the widest possible choice of advisors with whom they wish to work.

Under a theme on **linking Horizon Europe with EIP** a subtheme was proposed about the role of networks in developing indications and materials for increasing OGs involvement in Horizon Europe projects. Networks should also help to make OGs and Horizon projects' results more visible, available and usable. They could organise regular meetings with national coordinators of Horizon projects to gather inputs for OG calls.

More detail on the ideas, examples and proposals discussed can be found in Annex 1.

AOB and Closing

As an AOB point, Inge Van Oost (DG AGRI) informed the participants about the newly published tender for the future animation of SCAR Strategic Working Groups (SWG). Her presentation is available [here](#).

Tereza Budnakova (DG AGRI) thanked all the speakers and Sol members for active participation, interactive exchanges and valuable input that will be used to prepare online webinars. She announced that the next meeting of the Sol is scheduled for 23rd of September 2021. It is supposed to be organised with the help of the new service provider which should be in place for the third quarter of 2021.

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

ANNEX 1:

FEEDBACK FROM SESSION II ON THE CONCEPT OF ONLINE WEBINARS “PREPARING THE CAP STRATEGIC PLAN – THE ROLE OF INNOVATION NETWORKING IN THE MEMBER STATES”

Results of the group discussions

What subtopics and examples of good practices should be covered under the theme “**What is the role of the CAP networks in AKIS co-ordination, including interacting with the AKIS co-ordination bodies?**”. Any additional suggestions for that discussion theme?

Organisation of AKIS platforms/networking groups on a regular basis
AKIS networking opportunities
Exchanging lessons learnt between member states Also connect CAP to S3 platform Agrofood of EFRD Very new is the transition of Pillar 1 aspects such as ecoschemes and how to deal with the inevitable lower income coming from direct support Important category of good practices is how to get a fair income / fair price for agri-products, better negotiation position in the food chain
Bringing together different AKIS coordination bodies in a federalized country: Exchange of knowledge and experience, creating more transparency, interoperability of digital systems
Setting up of AKIS interventions
Presenting good examples of how other countries make success in doing the co-ordination both in national and regional aspects (example of regional innovation coach system presented in Subgroup meeting in December 2020)
Provide digital logistic for exchange of information between AKIS members. Provide a common taxonomy in concepts and data
Provide innovative networking opportunities for AKIS actors
Preparing EU-Resources (like EIP-AGRI info material, Thematic Network reports, Horizon results, ...) ready for use in the Member State
Providing a neutral ground for different actors to meet. Coordination support on the grandest scale. There are smaller networks already in Finland - bringing these to the same table.
Balancing stakeholder influence and their issues

Building a digital platform AKIS, Operation of the digital platform, Connection to existing AKIS platforms in other Member States or created under the H2020, Horizon Europe projects or other programs (e.g. NEFERTITI or SMART-AKIS in H2020).

Building on existing systems and ensuring that links are made with all actors who should be involved

What subtopics and examples of good practices should be covered under the theme “**How can CAP networks help facilitate the effective integration of all advisors (public and private) into the national AKIS?**”. Any additional suggestions for that discussion theme?

Providing a list of possible measures which can help the integration of advisors in the AKIS

Setting up indicators of performance for composition % of farmers % of advisors % researchers % business % public authorities

NL has already started building a system based on BAS; themes that mattered were “how can we secure independent advice (e.x. not related to machine suppliers needs) from both public and private advisers”, how can we train the trainers especially on societal and environmentally urgent themes, how can we secure a sufficient level of advisor expertise and experience” etc.

an obligation in EIP OG calls to have at least one advisor in

how to register or define or regulate impartial advisors so that they can access interventions and other types of AKIS related actions

Joint events

Training of advisors on innovation brokering and facilitation for OGs: for many this will be a very new task. Make use of the existing good examples (e.g. RISS innovation game in Scotland)

Provide training opportunities for advisors

use advisors to capture bottom-up problems or opportunities (regular events to do so)

See how regional platforms can be used to get in close contact with the advisors (and the practitioners) and also feed in relevant questions to develop the system

reduce admin burden for advice, Managing Authorities hate it (e.g. certification, public procurement,...) and often the result is that the advisory measure is not well implemented or the budget too limited

Connection of existing information systems of individual AKIS actors to the digital platform, focus on systematic quality check on advisory services providers

Facilitate ‘open days’ for connections with advisors.

What subtopics and examples of good practices should be covered under the theme “**What can CAP networks do to create and strengthen linkages between Horizon Europe and EIP implementation at national level?**”. Any additional suggestions for that discussion theme?

Cross border visits, “dating” events
Joint thematic events
Facilitate connection between OG and HE MAA projects through a keyword database
good database with themes where the potential consortia can look for OGs also working on the same theme and on the basis of this make thematic events (maybe according to the call topics?)
Rural Development Program should have a measure to support different type of contact, meetings, platforms between stakeholders
Connect researchers with HE project with farmers and advisors dealing with the R&I topic for active implementation of research results
Clear indications and development of visual material on how to involve OG in HE MAA projects.
systematic and regular events where researchers and farmers meet should be encouraged by the research coordinating directors, even by giving them extra points for those researchers careers (example in EIP seminar on AKIS is sept - IRTA)
Clear indications on participating rules in H2020 on how to involve farmers, advisors in the budget of HE projects
Further work on Practice abstracts. Are they being developed by H2020 projects? Are they useful? How many should be prepared in each R&D project. Where are they kept?
CAP network could create “Help us in topic” database, then Horizon could respond on demand
more about the development of EUREKA “farmbook”
Connect HE NCP’s with CAP contacts at national level and in project selection committees
To meet regularly with national coordinators of H2020 projects to obtain inputs for OG calls
Exchange information
To systematically assess the results of finished European projects and evaluate their potential replication in the country through OG calls
CAP Networks can provide information and good examples, practical solutions, field-days, cross visits demonstration actions with researchers, farmers, advisors, students

Translation of relevant information, both in terms of language and replicability of results
Flexibility with funding post-agreement to involve farmers and they are remunerated like other partners
Maybe take the ideas further with how to present Horizon projects with the film examples
Facilitating the linkage between national and European projects with similar themes and where they can complement each other. Hosting joint events etc.