modern AKIS

Together for Systems' Innovation

Funded by the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or European Commission. Neither the European Union nor the European Commission can be held responsible for them.

modernAKIS Together for Systems' Innovation

Modernisation of Agriculture through more efficient and effective Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation

Systems

Grant agreement number: 101060527

HORIZON Coordination and Support Actions

Deliverable 1.5

Compendium of insightful new know-how and ready-for-practice solutions

Due date of deliverable: M38 – October 2025

Actual submission date: M38 – October 2025

Call: HORIZON-CL6-2021-GOVERNANCE-01

Topic: HORIZON-CL6-2021-GOVERNANCE-01-25

Start date of the project: September 1st, 2022 **Duration:** 84 months

End date of the project: August 31st, 2029 **ProjectID:** 101000250

TYPE			DISSEMINATION LEVEL		
R	Document, report	☐	**PU**	Public	☒
DEM	Demonstrator, pilot, prototype	☐	**CO**	Confidential, only for members of the consortium (including the Commission Services)	☐
DEC	Websites, patent fillings, videos, etc.	☐			
OTHER		☒	**CI**	Classified, as referred to Commission Decision 2001/844/EC	☐

Project management	**Institution**	
Person in charge	**Valentina Carta**	CREA
Work package	WP1	Impactful framework for transformative AKIS journeys
Work package leader	Simona Cristiano	CREA
Author(s)	Simona Cristiano	CREA
	Valentina Carta	CREA
Additional Authors	Edward Kyei Twum	CREA
	Hanna Tamsalu	METK
	Juan Pedro Romero Trueba	MAPA
	Carmen Gil Gómez	MAPA
	Jennie Cederholm Björklund	Swedish CAP Network
	Elena-Teodora Miron	LFI
	Stephanie Bürger	LFI
	Gintarė Kučinskienė	LSMU
	Krisztina Magócs	AKI
	Sangeun Bae	UHOH
Version	V0	

Table of contents

List of abbreviations

AKIS	Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System
AKIS CB	AKIS Coordination Body
CAP	Common Agriculture Policy
CAP SP	Common Agriculture Policy-Strategic Plan
CCO	Cross Cutting Objective
CNA	Capacity needs' assessments
DIC	Digital Innovation Centre
EAFRD	European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development
EC	European Commission
EIP-AGRI	European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural productivity and Sustainability
EIP-OG	EIP-Operational groups
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF+	European Social Fund Plus
E&T	Education and training
EU	European Union
EUR	Euros
F2F	Farm to Fork Strategy
FBO	Farmer based organisations
ISS	Innovation Support Services
LAG	Local Action Group
MA	Managing Authorities of CAP Strategic Plans
MS	Member State
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
RDCPs	Rural Development Complementary Programmes
R&I	Research and Innovation
SCAR	Standing Committee of Agricultural Research
SOs	Specific Objectives of CAP SP
WP	Work Package
YF	Young farmer

List of Figures and Tables

1. Executive Summary

This is the third "Compendium of Insightful New Know-How and Ready-for-Practice Solutions" (D1.5) in a series to be delivered annually from 2023 to 2029. It has been prepared under Task 1.2, which focuses on collecting and sharing practice-based knowledge that is easily accessible to policymakers and AKIS actors, supporting them in improving knowledge flows and developing effective AKIS in their respective countries.

The Compendium serves as a space for sharing experiences and examples of ready-to-use and practice-oriented solutions that can inspire AKIS development and implementation across Europe. Its main purpose is to support the design and implementation of strategies that strengthen AKIS within Member States, contributing to the modernization of the agricultural sector through improved knowledge exchange, innovation, and digitalisation.

The Compendium is organized around a quadruple format:

- A **Report** that is delivered on annual basis as a collection of AKIS-in-practices! and insights on topical matters of interest for the key AKIS actors of change.
- **On-line Tool of AKIS-in-practices!** that is delivered in collaboration with WP2, starting from M18. This online tool will make the AKIS actors easily discovering the AKIS-in-practice! by key words/tags.
- **Videos and podcasts**: these are impactful methods that enable potential users to listen to stories of certain AKIS-in-practice! from implementers.

The methodology for collecting, developing, sharing, and discussing the contents of the Compendium builds on the multi-actor (MA) principles outlined in D1.1. It aims to address the specific needs and expectations of key AKIS actors of change by providing meaningful insights for the overall capacity development path applied by the TAJs.

In 2025, to enhance partner engagement in contributing to the development of practices, a **Core Development Group** was established (as foreseen in D1.4). The group includes members from Italy, Spain, Sweden, Hungary, and Lithuania, who have met on a bi-monthly basis. The establishment of this group has significantly improved the collection and exchange of practices. However, some challenges remain, particularly in identifying practices from outside each partner's own Member State.

Conversely, the Steering Group was not established, as several of its intended members would have overlapped with those of the Core Development Group, and it was therefore considered unnecessary to set it up at this stage.

For the 2026 Compendium, it is planned to continue working with the Core Development Group while rotating the participating Member States to ensure the involvement of all project partners over time.

This Compendium covers 11 themes and includes a total of 41 AKIS-in-Practice and Get-inspired4AKIS cases.

Over the years, by combining the practices collected in D1.3 and D1.4, we have achieved coverage of 25 Member States, representing a significant and growing outreach across the EU AKIS community.

The list of themes is consistent with the results of the Capacity needs assessment (CNA) validated in November 2024 during the General Assembly of the AKIS Coordination Bodies (Annex 1).

In brief, key points emerging from the themes are:

Theme 1 - Roles and functions of the AKIS coordination bodies

The number of practices has risen to 23. In 2025, the majority of AKIS coordination bodies actively worked and met, with some previously missing bodies, particularly at the regional level, being established. These practices detail the functional organization of the AKIS coordination bodies in Austria, Romania, Malta, Bulgaria, and the Lombardy, Tuscany, Sicily, and Emilia Romagna Regions in Italy. In 2025, nearly all AKIS coordination bodies were established in the member states, enabling ongoing analysis of their models, roles, and functions. The analysis reveals substantial adoption of two governance models: managerial and

networking/collaborative models. The **managerial model** of AKIS coordination bodies is characterised by the retention of responsibilities, roles, and functions at the institutional level, managed by the Member Authority. The **networking/collaborative model** features shared roles and functions among newly established collective bodies, such as the CAP network, steering committees, and working/thematic groups.

Theme 2 - Delivery mechanisms for the AKIS strategies

This Compendium features two practices focused on the delivery mechanisms of AKIS strategies. The first practice explores regional approaches, highlighting the regional choices made in the selection calls for EIP Operational Groups. The second practice addresses ensuring flexibility in EIP-Agri cooperation for innovation projects, emphasizing the importance of adaptable frameworks that support diverse innovation collaborations.

Theme 3 - Training, knowledge exchange and information

This D1.5 Compendium showcases 11 practices covering Demofarms, Knowledge Flows, and Training.

- Demofarms: 4 practices highlight hands-on learning, demonstration farm networks, and digital experimentation (e.g., in Czech Republic, Belgium–Flanders, and France).
- Knowledge Flows: 2 practices illustrate knowledge transfer programs in Estonia and the sharing of innovation through the Innov'action project.
- Training: 5 practices include innovative Master's programs in agricultural advisory services, the use of a game (PAC Game) to learn about the CAP, peer mentoring, and the Innovation Farm Project. These programs provide comprehensive training for both students and farmers, offering valuable insights and practical knowledge. The tools presented, such as interactive games and mentoring systems, help facilitate the learning process by promoting active engagement, peer collaboration, and hands-on experiences that enhance understanding and application of the concepts taught.

Theme 4 - CAP networks

The two practices presented in the D1.5 focus on the organization of transnational events and vocational training aimed at promoting AKIS. These practices highlight the importance of fostering cross-border collaboration and providing effective training opportunities to enhance the dissemination and adoption of agricultural knowledge and innovation systems.

Theme 5 - Back-office

1 practice has been collected under the Organization of back-office services, specifically the Back Office in Puglia region (Italy), recently established.

Theme 6 - Integration of advisory services

Under this theme, the Compendium includes 2 practices showcasing Methods & Tools for advisory services. The cases include an Advisory Support Service in the Spanish AKIS Advisors Platform and a Plant protection alert service in Austria.

Theme 7 - Integration of innovation support services

This Compendium includes 1 practice that describes Denmark's Agricultural Knowledge Hub, which integrates Research, Advice, and Innovation.

Theme 8 - Climate change mitigation & Environmental care

There is 1 practice which illustrates how farmers share their agroecological practices through AGLAE in France.

Theme 9 - Support to generational renewal

There are three practices that effectively leverage the potential of AKIS interventions to support generational renewal in agriculture. These cases include the Generation Renewal of Agricultural Advisors in Estonia, Next

Generation – Farm Handover in Focus, and the Rural Campus Program: Bridging Generations and Knowledge Through Rural Internships. These programs aim to tackle the aging issue among both farmers and advisors, making rural areas more appealing and fostering sustainability.

Theme 10 - Improve the position of farmers in the food chain

The D1.5 Compendium includes 3 practices that showcase some experiences aimed to leverage AKIS interventions to enhance farmers' positions in value chains.

- Integrated Supply Chain Projects implemented through pilot actions, investments, and demonstration activities (Macro-supply chain projects in Abruzzo Region, Italy).
- Practical Training and Advisory for Value-Added Agriculture in Short Supply Chains.
- Knowledge Sharing and Capacity Building Systems for Short Food Supply Chains (SFSC), focusing on training SFSC organizers and mentors.

Theme 11 – Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) of AKIS

Theme 11 is a new topic compared to the previous two Compendia (D1.3 and D1.4). The practices focus on methods and tools for evaluation that can assist Operational Groups, or managing authorities in assessing the impact of implemented interventions and in building future interventions based on evidence.

All in all, for all the proposed themes, some food for thought and insights offer some reflections for follow-ups of the reported AKIS-in-Practices! and on the opportunities for capacity building and networking activities that can be certainly considered for further activities and the co-construction of the TAJs by the different WP leaders and contributors and the AKIS actors that will join the network of modernAKIS.

During the forthcoming months, certainly, networking, communication and capacity building activities of modernAKIS project will focus on the proposed practices to help the key AKIS actors deepening into the experiences, reflecting on possible replication and co-creating new/adapted solutions for the implementation of the AKIS strategies in MSs.

2. Introduction

The "Compendium of insightful new know-how and ready-for-practice solutions" (this D1.5) is prepared under task 1.2, which entails collecting and delivering practice-based/oriented knowledge (new know-how, insights and practical solutions) that is widely available, shared and accessible and that enables policy makers and other AKIS actors improving knowledge flows and developing well-functioning AKIS in their countries.

The aim is to co-develop with partners and other key AKIS actors ready-to-be-put-in-use knowledge and practical insights (e.g. administrative procedures) that, over the years 2023-2029 will hopefully support the (re)design and implementation of the strategies strengthening the AKIS in MSs.

This will ensure a valuable contribution to the cross-cutting objective of modernizing the sector by fostering and sharing knowledge, innovation and digitalisation and, also, to the other specific objectives of the CAP, along with those that are linked to Cluster 6 of Horizon Europe Programme, such as the European Green Deal, the Farm to Fork Strategy.

3. The Compendium … in practice

The Compendium is delivered on annual basis and its themes and topics are defined throughout modernAKIS project, by following up the yearly capacity needs' assessments (CNA in T1.1.).

The Compendium has a quadruple format:

- **AKIS-in-practices!** and **Get-Inspired4AKIS**!, that are ready-to-be-put-in-practice solutions for delivering the AKIS strategies that are produced on an iterative basis during a year and by following up the needs of the key AKIS actors (CNA in T1.2) and of the other activities of modernAKIS (e.g. networking and/or capacity building workshops of WP2 and WP3/WP4). Starting from the year 2024, it was decided to include some potential practices (**Get-Inspired4AKIS**!) that are results delivered under other Horizon projects (e.g. EU4Advice), ERAMUS+ (e.g. RAMONES) and other types of projects. They are considered as inspirational and ready-to-be-put-in-practice solutions, even if not yet used as CAP interventions. **AKIS-in-practices!** and **Get-Inspired4AKIS**! are used as contents for workshops which over each year are run in collaboration with the other WPs, by focusing on the specific topics, through helping the key AKIS actors deepening into the experiences, reflecting on possible replication and co-create new/adapted solutions.
- **Report** (e.g. D1.3, D1.4, D1.5), that is delivered on annual basis as a collection of **AKIS-in-practices!** and **Get-Inspired4AKIS**!
- On-line Tool of AKIS-in-practices! and of the Get-Inspired4AKIS! as part of the akisconnect.eu platform, that was launched since March 2024 (M18) after a co-conceptualization process held in collaboration with T2.4 and T5.1 and with the other WP/tasks leaders. This online tool supports the AKIS actors' exploration, (e.g. by themes, topics, countries, key words/tags) of those practices that might be relevant for their specific purposes of use.
- **Videos and podcasts**: these are put in use as more impactful media tools that enable potential users **to** listen to stories of some practices from implementers.

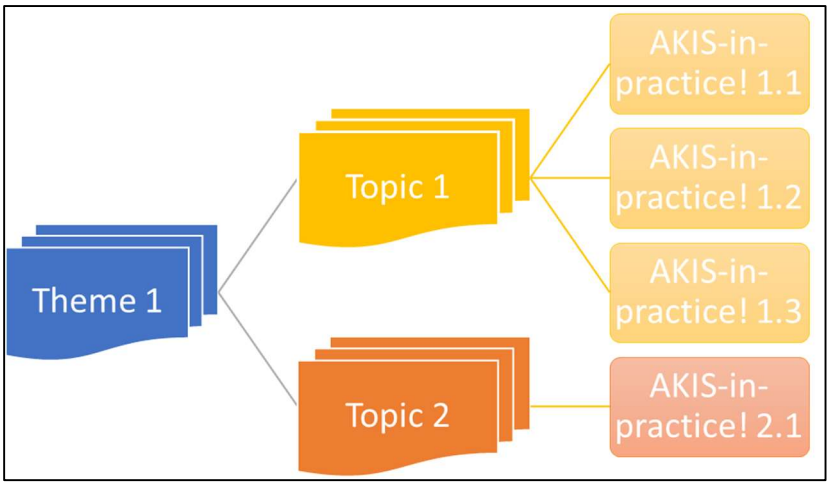
It is worth noting that, the Compendium is meant to provide contents based on practical solutions and examples already applicable/applied and insights that well fit specific topics of actual interest to feed on an on-going basis networking (WP2), capacity building (WP3 and WP4), communication and exploitation (WP5). Therefore, these practices are not subject to any formal assessment or evaluation process to determine whether they qualify as "good" or "best" practices. Instead, each one is presented simply as a practice, valued for its potential contribution to AKIS strategies. Without an established selection or evaluation framework, these practices remain diverse resources that stakeholders can consider for inspiration, adaptation, and further development within AKIS contexts.

4. How is the Compendium organized?

The Compendium is organized by the themes established for the purpose of the CNA, under which a further categorization is based on specific topics (Figure 1).

Therefore, one theme (e.g. Delivery of the AKIS strategies) may incorporate one or more topics (e.g. simplified cost options; implementation of the strategic approach) and each topic may include one or more AKIS-in-practice! or Get-inspired4AKIS! (e.g. standard unit costs for advisors; rewards/priority for OGs including training of farmers into respective actions plans).

Figure 1: Structure of the Compendium



Each practice has a structure that helps possible use by potential users, and it includes the following paragraphs:

Table 1 – Contents of the practices

Rationale	Grounding motivations/problem/opportunity for the specific practice
Solution	Brief description of the practice applied to follow-up the rationale
…in practice	Practical information on how the practice has been/can be applied on the ground
Practical implications for replicability	Insights and tips to consider in case of replication/adaptation
Benefits	The benefits that the practice bring to end-users
Further sources of information	Sources of practical information for further knowledge about the practice
Potential users of this practice	Target groups that can implement the practice
Country/Region	Where the practice comes from
Contacts	Who to ask about the practice

5. The Compendia 2023 and 2024 (D1.3 and D1.4) in numbers

The 2025 Compendium (D1.5) included 41 AKIS-in-practice! and Get-inspired4AKIS!, bringing the overall number of drafted practices to 101, considering those from D1.3 and D1.4. These practices have been widely disseminated through a variety of activities and communication channels, as illustrated in Table 2.

*Table 2: Statistics about the dissemination of the AKIS-in-practices! (D1.3 and D1.4)**

Platform/Social Media	Metrics
AKISconnect	• Views: 2,646 • Active users: 881
Youtube	• Views: 1,041
Linkedin **(modernAKIS and AKISconnect)**	• Impressions: 8,913 • Likes: 402 • Clicks: 334 • Comments: 4
X (formerly Twitter) **(modernAKIS and AKISconnect)**	• Impressions: 1,446 • Likes: 55 • Retweet: 28 • Clicks: 28
Facebook **(modernAKIS and AKISconnect)**	• Impressions: 2,960 • Reach: 2,668 • Reactions: 147 • Clicks: 86

** Data update on 28/10/2025.*

6. The Compendium 2025 (D1.5) in numbers

The topics around which the practices have been collected are aligned with the CNA 2024, as defined in November 2024, during the GA of the AKIS coordination bodies (Annex 1).

Moreover, other topics that were already covered in D1.3 and D1.4 have been revisited in view to provide a more comprehensive overview of actual EU AKIS-in-Practice! and Get-Inspired4AKIS! practices.

The AKIS-in-Practice! and Get-Inspired4AKIS practices collected in D1.5 are immediately replicable, with necessary adaptations for the specific contexts of different countries, and include the option to contact the responsible representatives for further clarification.

Numbers about themes and Countries applying the practices collected are shown in Figure 2, and Figure 3.

The AKIS-in-Practice! and Get-inspired4AKIS! in the following list are progressively numbered to follow the ones reported by the Compendium 2024 (D1.4) and Compendium 2023 (D1.3) under the same Theme/Topic.

So far, the total number of practices reported by the Compendia (D1.3, D1.4 and D1.5) is 101.

Table 3: List of themes/topics and AKIS-in-practice!/Get-Inspired4AKIS included in this Compendium

Themes	Topics	AKIS-in-practice! / Get-inspired4AKIS!
1. Roles and functions of the AKIS coordination bodies	*Functional organization of the AKIS coordination bodies*	*AKIS-in-practice!1.16 – AKIS Coordination Body – Austria*
		AKIS-in-practice!1.17 – AKIS Coordination Body - Romania
		AKIS-in-practice!1.18 – AKIS Coordination Body - Malta
		AKIS-in-practice!1.19 – AKIS Coordination Body - Bulgaria
		AKIS-in-practice!1.20 – AKIS Coordination Body – Lombardy Region (Italy)
		AKIS-in-practice!1.21 – AKIS Coordination Body – Tuscany Region (Italy)
		AKIS-in-practice!1.22 – AKIS Coordination Body – Sicily Region (Italy)
		AKIS-in-practice!1.23 – AKIS Coordination Body – Emilia Romagna Region (Italy)
2. Delivery mechanisms for the AKIS strategies		No practices
3. Training, knowledge exchange and information	Demofarms	*Get-inspired4AKIS!3.12 – Demonstration Farms in Czech Republic: A Practical Approach to strengthen the system of knowledge transfer in agriculture and related fields.*
		AKIS-in-practice!3.13 – Hands-on Learning through Multi-Actor Demonstration Projects in the Belgium–Flanders AKIS.
		Get-inspired4AKIS!3.14 – The DEPHY-Ferme Network: Strengthening Farmer Collaboration and Innovation to Reduce Pesticide Dependence in France
		Get-inspired4AKIS! 3.15 – Digital Experimentation at Farm Level: Bridging Research and Practice for Smarter Agriculture
	Knowledge Flows	*AKIS-in-practice!3.16 – Knowledge transfer programs in Estonia*
		AKIS-in-practice!3.17 – Innov'action: Sharing of innovation in a multiactor channel

	Training	*Get-inspired4AKIS!3.18 – Innovative Master's Program in Agricultural Advisory Services: Building Competence for Future AKIS*
		AKIS-in-practice!3.19 – Playing to learn the CAP: the PAC Game experience
		Get-Inspired4AKIS!3.20 – Certificate Course "Professional Representation Work in Rural Areas" in Austria
		AKIS-in-practice!3.21 – Bridging the Gap Between Innovation and Agricultural Practice: The Innovation Farm Project
		AKIS-in-practice!3.22 – Building Regenerative Farms through Peer Mentoring Programmes in France
4. CAP networks	Structural organization and activity plan	*AKIS-in-practice!4.5 – Network to Innovate: Transnational AKIS Cooperation through Thematic Webinars*
		AKIS-in-practice!4.6 – Shaping the future of young farmers, successors and advisors through EIP-Agri innovations: training program at agricultural schools
5. Back-office	Organization of back-office services	*AKIS-in-practice!5.3 – Back Office in Puglia region (Italy)*
6. Integration of advisory services	*Methods&tools for advisory services*	*AKIS-in-practice!6.5 – Advisors support Service in the Spanish AKIS Advisors Platform*
		Get-inspired4AKIS!6.6 – Plant protection alert service in Austria
7. Integration of innovation support services		*AKIS-in-practice!7.3 – Denmark's Agricultural Knowledge Hub: Integrating Research, Advice and Innovation*
8. Climate change mitigation & Environmental care		*AKIS-in-practice!8.4 – AGLAE: Farmers share their agroecological practices*
9. Support to generational renewal		*AKIS-in-practice!9.5 – Generation Renewal of Agricultural Advisors in Estonia*
		Get-inspired4AKIS!9.6 – Next Generation-Farm Handover in Focus
		Get-inspired4AKIS!9.7 – Rural Campus Program: Bridging Generations and Knowledge Through Rural Internships

10. Improve the position of farmers in the food chain	*AKIS-in-practice!10.4 – Macro-supply chain projects in Abruzzo Region, Italy*
	AKIS-in-practice!10.5 – Practical Training and Advisory for Value-Added Agriculture in Short Supply Chains
	Get-inspired4AKIS! 10.6 Knowledge sharing and capacity building in short food supply chains (SFSC): training SFSC organizers and mentors through national and international practices
11. Monitoring and Evaluation of the AKIS strategies	*Get-inspired4AKIS!11.1 – Assessing Stakeholder Readiness: using the SRL Tool to strengthen innovation uptake*
	AKIS-in-practice!11.2 – Structured planning and monitoring framework for Operational Groups: the Sardinian approach
	AKIS-in-practice!11.3 – From Innovation to Evidence: Evaluating OGs impacts Using FSDN indicators
	AKIS-in-practice!11.4 – Predicting Success: Machine Learning for Accurate AKIS Target Indicators under CAP
	Get-inspired4AKIS!11.5 – Quality assessment tool of the advisory services
	AKIS-in-practice!11.6 – Measuring Cooperation and Knowledge Flows in EIP-AGRI through Social Network Analysis
	AKIS-in-practice!11.7 – Evaluation of EIP-AGRI Operational Groups in Sweden
12. Cooperation for innovation under EIP-Agri	*AKIS-in-practice! 12.1 – Regional approaches to select EIP Operational Groups*
	AKIS-in-practice! 12.2 – Ensuring flexibility of EIP-Agri cooperation for innovation projects

Figure 2: Number of Practices per Country (D1.3, D1.4 and D1.5)

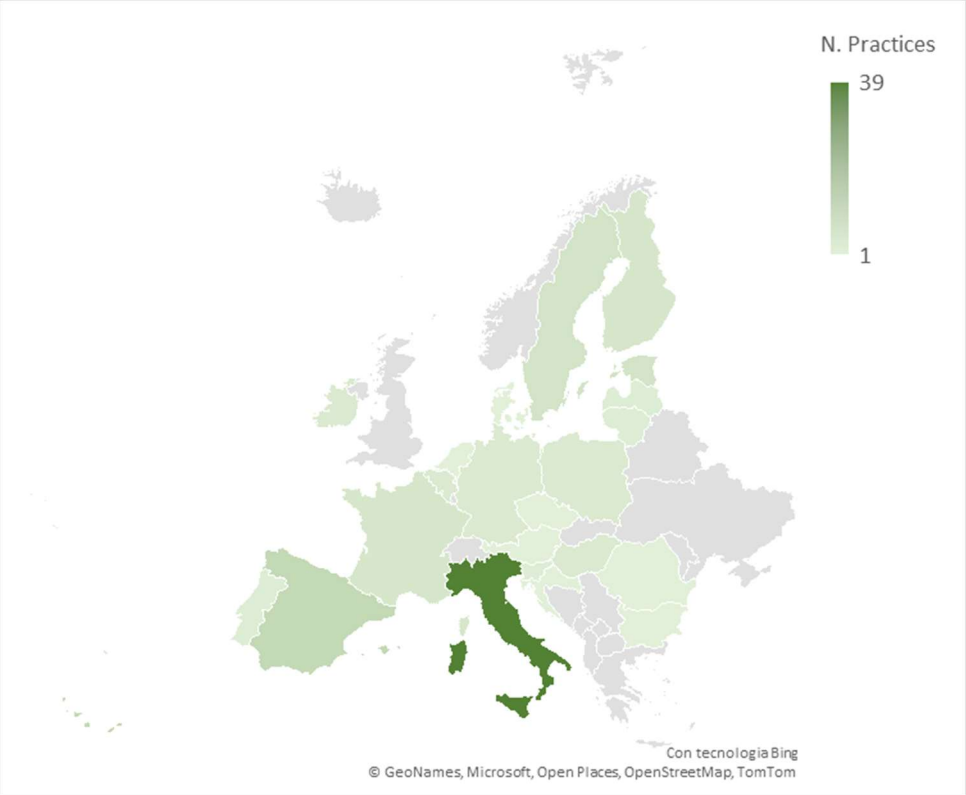
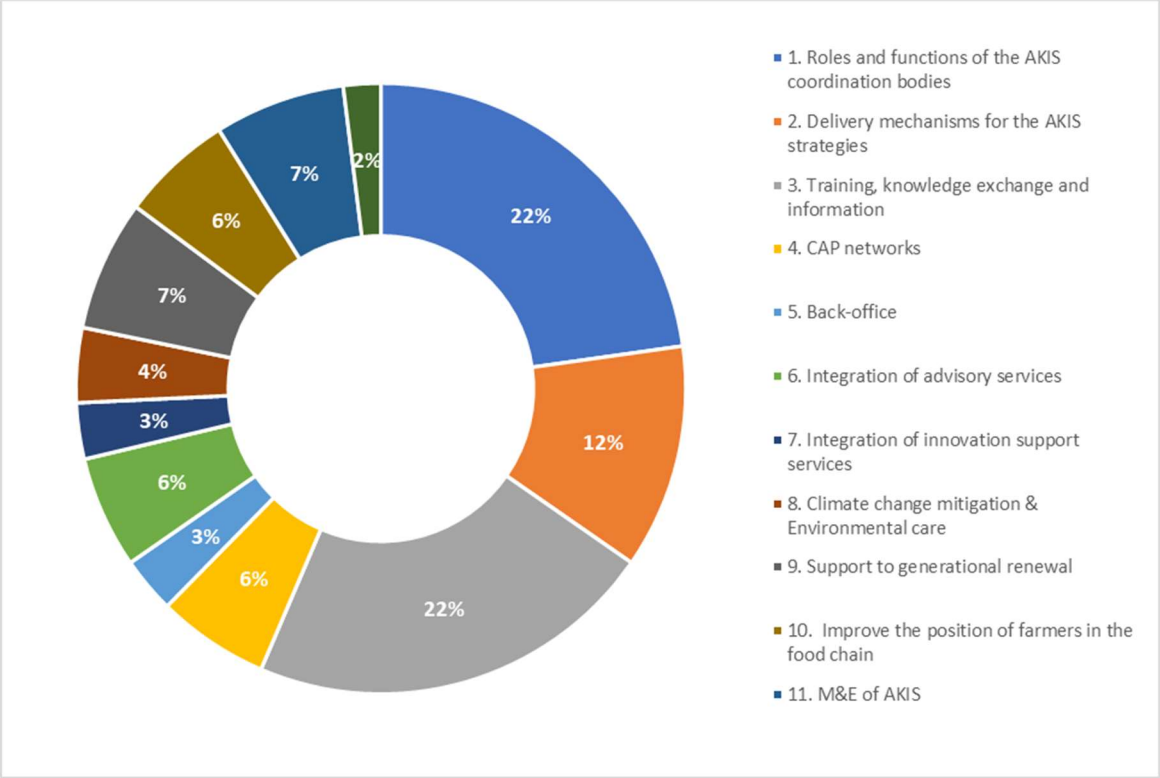


Figure 3: Number of Practices per Theme (D1.3, D1.4 and D1.5)



Share your AKIS-in-practice! or Get-Inspired4AKIS!

The collection of AKIS-in-Practice! & Get-Inspired4AKIS! for year 2025

Theme 1

Roles and functions of the AKIS coordination bodies

Keywords/Tags

Governance

AKIS coordination body

RATIONALE

What are the AKIS coordination bodies?

The institute of the AKIS Coordination Bodies (AKIS CBs) represent the first attempt, within the European policies, to identify an institutional structure in charge of creating an enabling environment for innovation.

Indeed, the introduction of this institute comes along with the acquisition of policy dignity of the AKIS and their strategies, which main goal is to strengthen the agricultural systems in rural areas and contribute to more competitive and sustainable primary sector in Europe (Cristiano et al., 2023; D1.1).

So that, AKIS CB are new governing actors of the CAP Strategic Plans (CAP SPs) 2023-2027, which responsible are identified under chapters 8 of the CAP SPs and which overall goal is to enable the environment for well-functioning AKISs, through fostering cooperation, effectively combining the interventions of the CAP SPs and satisfying the need for a quicker, more qualitative and more inclusive AKIS.

Approaches and roles of AKIS coordination bodies in CAP-SPs

Indeed, as it emerges from the study on the comparative analysis of the AKIS in EU (Fanos et al. 2023; D1.10), "the managing authorities play a pivotal role in strategizing the AKIS coordination and serving as the umbrella organization". While the strategic coordination tasks are taken up by the managing authorities, multiple approaches/models are observed across the CAP SPs for the operational coordination tasks.

Firstly, the different institutional configuration of MSs, with some having the competence for the primary sector at national and some at regional levels makes some difference, by shaping more centralized or decentralized approaches to AKIS coordination.

For example, "in MSs with a decentralized AKIS organization, particularly Germany, Italy and Spain, role of AKIS CBs at the national level is dedicated to bringing regional or provincial AKIS coordination bodies together by setting up a working group or an advisory board in which the group proposes an overall strategy and facilitate knowledge exchange between the regions" (Birke et al. 2023; D1.10).

Box 1: AKIS governance levels across EU

The organisation of national AKISs and the degree of public sector engagement in the AKIS governance entail differences in how AKIS CBs may implement their coordination tasks:

- AKIS CBs in centralized AKIS governance with strong engagement of managing authorities may have a more focused mandate at the national level with a well-defined hierarchical structure that also influence the coordination efforts.
- AKIS CBs in a centralized AKIS governance with medium or low engagement of managing authorities need to navigate their coordination by aligning between the state and non-state structures, which may be diverse and flexible.
- AKIS CBs in a decentralized AKIS governance will need to facilitate coordination among diverse regional actors while aligning with the strategies at the national level.
- AKIS CBs in a hybrid AKIS governance (centralized with a tendency for decentralization), similar to those in a decentralized AKIS need to facilitate coordination among regional actors while aligning to the strategies at the national level.

Source: (Birke et al. 2023)

WHICH FUNCTIONS TO ENSURE AN OVERALL AKIS COORDINATION

As a matter of fact, the only reference to the responsibilities and tasks of AKIS CBs is provided by a tool of the Tool 8.1 Tool for the CAP Cross-Cutting Objective (EC, 2021) that proposes the followings:

- Acting as the contact point for the Commission as regards the governance and coordination of the AKIS strategic approach.
- Organising the advice and advisors and all other related AKIS interventions.
- Keeping close and regular contact with the main AKIS (regional) coordinators and actors in the country by giving suggestions for encouragement of more effective knowledge exchange activities (advice, training, ...), including also the generation and co-creation of innovation (EIP OGs) and the broad sharing of it.

However, beyond the institute and the identification of some tasks, the coordination of the AKIS is a strategic process of systems functioning and transformation and, consequently, governance models in MSs should be appropriately defined by including clear a definition of role, responsibilities, and approaches, along with capacity development strategies that would enable these bodies playing an overall process of coordination of the AKIS and their actors towards the good implementation of the respective strengthening strategies.
“The challenge lies in strategically aligning knowledge exchange and collaboration between diverse actors at various levels” (Birke et al. 2023; D1.10).
All in all, the configuration of appropriate models of of AKIS coordination bodies should consider that some key processes should be organized under their responsibility in view of enabling the environment for effective knowledge flows and innovation towards well-functioning AKISs (Cristiano et al., 2023; D1.1, Annex 2). Among them, the AKIS-CB should balance, according to the contextual situation of the AKIS, the roles of “player” with the one of “enabler” as it showed in figure 2: (Table 1)

FIRST INSIGHTS FROM PRACTICES

In the course of 2024, almost all AKIS coordination bodies were established in the member states. This has allowed for continued analysis of their models, roles, and functions. This D1.4 includes 10 AKIS coordination bodies, bringing the total number of practices related to this topic to 15.
Given their recent establishment, the review of practices related to AKIS coordination bodies is expected to be completed by the first half of 2025.
The analysis of the models represented by the new practices reveals a substantial alignment with the previous findings in Compendia (D1.3 and D1.4).
In fact, two governance models are being applied (Figure 1: AKIS coordination bodies’ models in EU):

- A **managerial model** characterizes those AKIS coordination bodies which responsibility, role and the functions are fully maintained at institutional level, under the responsibility of the MA of the SP. The coordination functions are all run by an already existing unit (e.g., research and innovation) or a new established unit, but still by public servants of the Ministry of Agriculture. Tasks applied under this model concern the simple translation, at the level of AKIS strategies, of typical functions of the MAs, such as the planning, management, monitoring and evaluation of AKIS interventions. Possibly, the functions of the AKIS coordination bodies are supported by technical assistance.

In practice, the managerial model implies that the AKIS-CB collaborates with other institutional governance bodies of the SP (such as the responsible for communication, the monitoring and evaluation unit, paying agency, etc. in ch.7 of the CAP SPs) that are internal to the MA of the CAP SP or external (e.g. ministry of research).

In these cases, the planned operational activities are varied and include networking, that is delegated to the CAP Network and to other bodies that remain external to the AKIS-CB, M&E, information for enable the access to the CAP SP, strategy formulation and implementation.

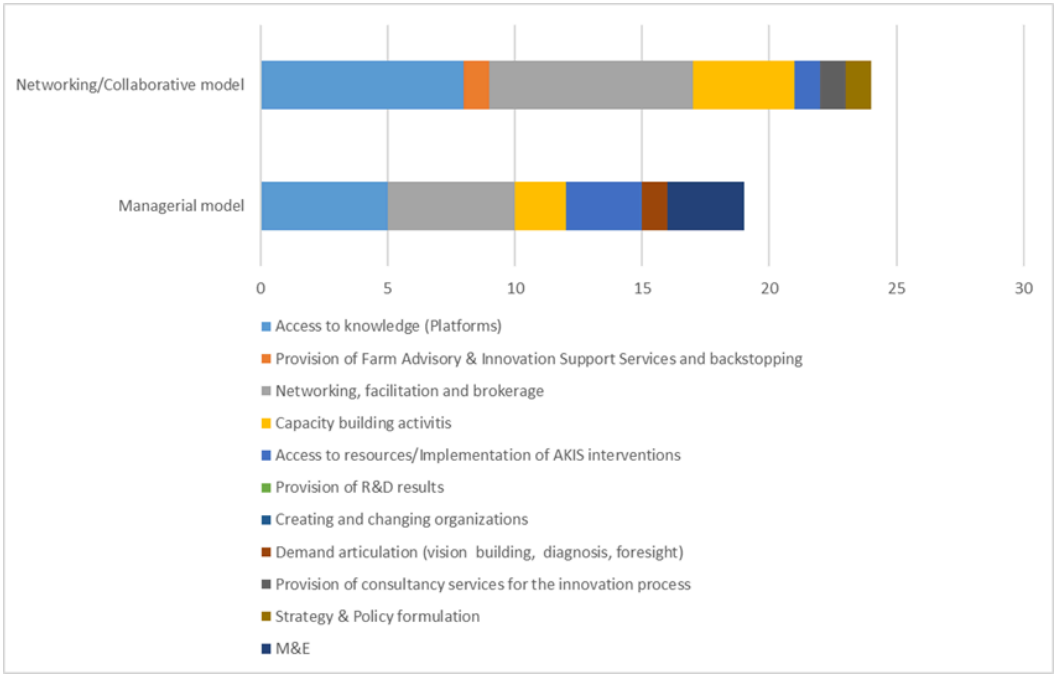
- A **networking/collaborative model**, that characterizes those AKIS coordination bodies which role and functions are almost or fully shared within, mostly new established, collective bodies, such as the CAP network, steering committees, working groups, ect.

In these cases, in general, typical functions of strategy management and implementation are assigned to the institutional body, while other entities are assigned more operational functions that better suit their nature: research, territorial networking, advisory services, etc.

In these cases, the operational activities, are evidently focused on networking and capacity building activities (newsletters, conferences and discussion forums) and enabling access to knowledge particularly by the establishment of web platforms and innovation databases.

This model is applied, for example, by the Region of Sardinia, whose AKIS coordinating body is a collegial body including institutional entities (i.e., the Minister and the Managing Authority) and non-institutional entities (Agencies) with a clear separation of their respective tasks: planning, programming and management, implementation, monitoring, payment and monitoring of interventions.

Figure 1: AKIS coordination bodies' models in EU



Source: own elaboration from CAP Strategic Plans

FOOD FOR THINKING

The results of the observation on the first modelling and approaching the AKIS CBs, brings some reflections on the needs for capacity building and networking activities that can be certainly considered in modernAKIS:

- How to configure best fitting models in each MS? Managerial versus Networking.
- How to organize procedures for monitoring of the AKIS strategies and connections with the paying agencies?
- Which curricula/competences are needed for the AKIS CBs?
- How to better take advantage of interconnections with projects and cross-border collaboration? (e.g. modernAKIS)
- How to organize procedures for fruitful collaboration within collective AKIS CB? Which separation of tasks and how to coordinate knowledge flows and common goals between the different members of the AKIS CB?
- Which organization in regionalized systems? Which coordination between the AKIS CBs of different levels?
- Which support by the CAP Network?

HOW TO FOLLOW-UP WITH THE RESULTS OF COLLECTION OF AKIS-IN-PRACTICE!

- AKIS CB identity cards. Short description of the key features of the AKIS coordination bodies in view to share information for knowledge and further interaction.
- Practice workshops, aimed at sharing practices, reflecting on experiences and views on the models applied, early functioning and further organization of coordination tasks.
- Peer-to-peer review, within the CoPs in view to allow comparison and mutual learning.
- Tailored capacity building to address both strategic aspects like planning and priority setting, as well as operational tasks such as collaboration facilitation and communication (Birke et al., 2023).
- Capacity building on exploitation of modernAKIS
- Capacity building on functional skills to “to engage and align diverse actors to create a coordinated approach” (Birke et al., 2023).
- Training on fundamentals on AKIS concepts and principles, system thinking structure, infrastructures, processes, governance and coordination.
- Training on AKIS actor diagnosis, assessing interactions and benchmarking performance (Birke et al., 2023).

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- Cristiano et al., 2023 (D1.1 modernAKIS)
- EU SCAR AKIS (2019), Preparing for Future AKIS in Europe. Brussels, European Commission
- Fanos et al., 2023 (D1.10 modernAKIS)
- Fanos et al., 2022 (i2connect)
- Knierim A., Gerster-Bentaya M., Birke F., Bae S., Kelly T., 2020. Innovation advisors for interactive innovation process: Conceptual grounds and common understandings. Deliverable 1.1 i2Connect project

modernAKIS Together for Systems' Innovation

AKIS Coordination Body

AKIS-in-Practice! 1.16

AKIS Coordination Body in Austria

Keywords/Tags

Governance

AKIS Coordination body

Potential users

Managing authorities of the CAP Strategic Plan

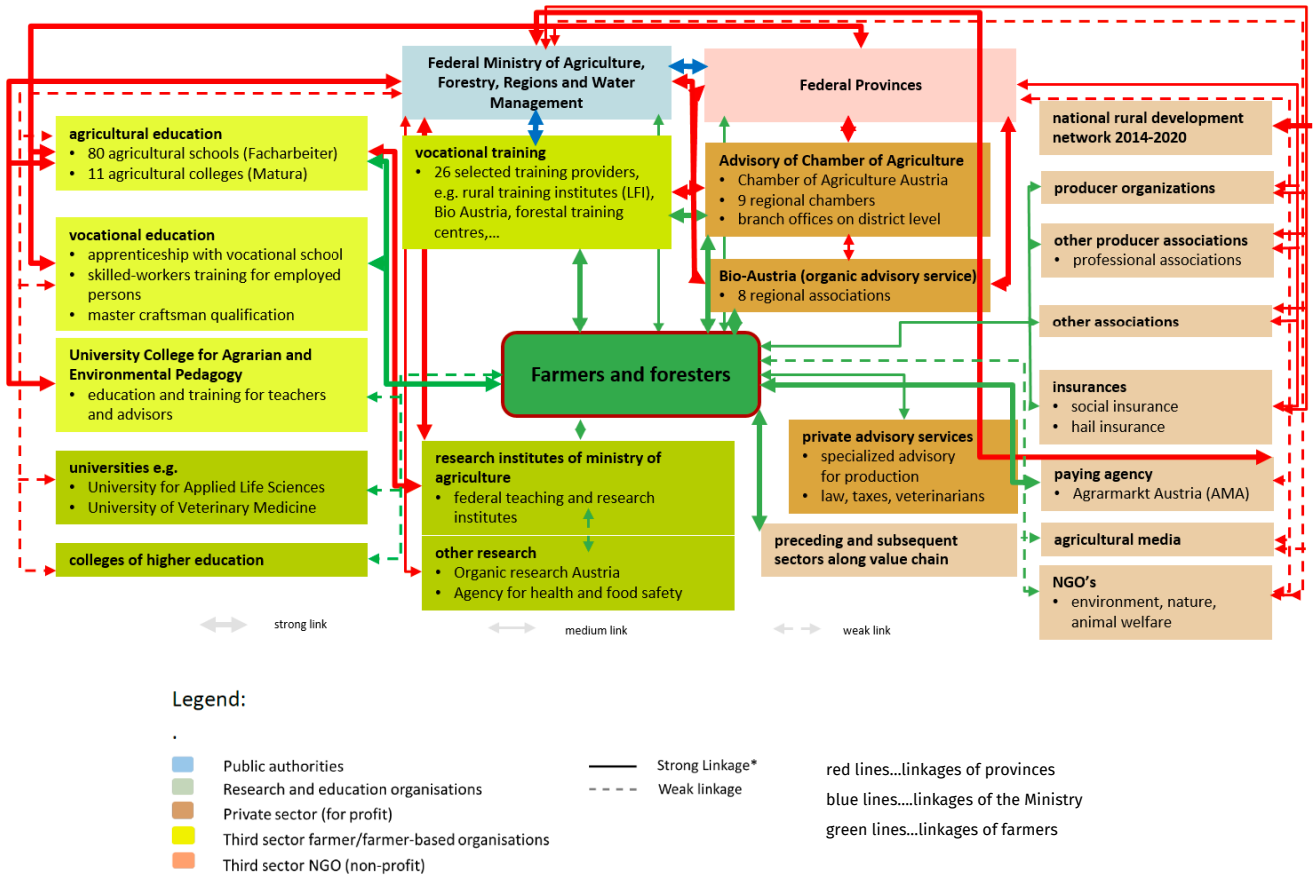
AKIS Cordination bodies

AKIS CONTEST

The Austrian Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS) builds on comprehensive vocational training, adult education, an extensive and high-quality range of advisory services and agricultural research landscape. The AKIS is lean and the relatively few actors are well integrated. It relies mainly on public or, to a large extent, publicly funded and well-established organisations. Private companies play a subordinate role. In the system, which has been established and stood the test of time over decades, responsibilities are clearly defined, overlaps or competition are rare, cooperation and knowledge flows within the AKIS are good and thus the use of funds is efficient. Since 2023 the AKIS Cooperation Platform, which is part of the Austrian CAP Network, supports exchange between actors as well as the evolution of the Austrian AKIS.

Topics of public interest are embedded as cross-sectional matters in a broad agricultural and forestry education and advice offer and are successfully transported into practice. A cornerstone of the AKIS is the cooperation between research, education and advisory services. The transfer between research and practice in Austria works relatively well and the AKIS Cooperation Platform now supports the need for additional alignment and coordination.

Fig. 1: Austrian AKIS Diagram



Source: i2connect AKIS country report (2024)

RATIONALE

The political relevance given to AKIS strategies in the context of the CAP Strategic Plans (SPs) 2023-2027 has certainly highlighted the opportunity of defining governance bodies aimed at coordinating the AKIS-relating interventions and actors in view of their better implementation and contribution to the crosscutting and specific objectives of the CAP SPs. The CAP SP 2023-2027 indicates as a as a point of contact of the European Commission and of the European CAP Network particularly, the AKIS coordination body.

The lack of a clear definition of role and functions of the institute of the AKIS coordination bodies by the EU regulation has certainly favored the managing authorities of the CAP SPs in identifying the configurations that best fit the needs for governance of the AKISs and the expectations of the respective actors.

In Austria, the AKIS coordination body was set up in line with the regulatory requirements and with the objectives of the AKIS strategy as delineated in Chapter 8 of the national CAP SP 2023-2027.

IN PRACTICE

1. Who is the AKIS CB

The AKIS Coordination Body is the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Climate and Environmental Protections, Regions and Water Management, Department: Rural Policy, Data Management and Continuous Education.

2. Composition of the AKIS CB

The AKIS coordination body nominally encompasses one responsible at the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Climate and Environmental Protections, Regions and Water Management. Other Departments and Units in the Managing Authority/Ministry inform, communicate and coordinate with the AKIS Coordination Body to tackle the needs and opportunities as well as the decision-making about the AKIS strategy and its implementation.

The AKIS Cooperation Platform, which is part of the Austrian CAP Network, supports the AKIS Coordination Body in specific operational activities agreed upon on a yearly basis.

3. Functions attributed to the AKIS CB

The Austrian AKIS CB is responsible for the implementation and control of the AKIS strategy, and the corresponding measures as laid out in the CAP SP 2023 – 2027. In addition, the AKIS CB works together and coordinates with responsible persons/departments in the Ministry and Managing Authority in the implementation of the AKIS strategy. He is the main contact point for key AKIS stakeholders as well as the AKIS Cooperation Platform regarding all matters related to the implementation of the AKIS strategy.
The person nominated as the AKIS CB is operationally also responsible for the CAP SP interventions on Advisory Services and Knowledge Transfer in Agriculture.
The AKIS Cooperation Platform within the Austrian CAP Network provides support to the evolution of the “basic functions” of the AKIS:

- support the Ministry (and AKIS CB) in the coordination and continuous development of the AKIS
- disseminate existing knowledge from agriculture, forestry, business, research, science and education as well as politics, increasing the accessibility of this knowledge for rural actors, and
- the development of practical innovations and solutions with the involvement of all relevant stakeholders.

This includes exemplary activities like:

- the facilitation of EIP OGs and support in identifying advisors (as obligatory partner in the consortium)
- the provision of support in opening up the research and innovation process as well as to support impact pathways of project results towards exploitation
- the promotion of research and innovation needs from practice, even if the collection may often be done by advisors, who meet farmers on a daily basis
- support to increase participation in national and international research and innovation activities
- strengthening networking and exchange with relevant actors and initiatives at European level
- organizing and running of the AKIS Community of Practice.

The AKIS Cooperation Platform prepares together with a Steering Group and key AKIS stakeholders a yearly list of itemized activities, which are subject of approval of the Ministry respectively the AKIS Coordination Body. Financing of the activities and the platform itself are part of the Austrian CAP Network budget, under the technical assistance funding.

4. Procedures for interplaying with other AKIS actors and with the MA of the CAP SP

Regular engagement with key AKIS actors as well as engagement on an international level in AKIS activities and exchanges was a priority in the design of the AKIS Cooperation Platform. Thus, the design of procedures for interplay in the coordination of the Austrian AKIS are as follows:

- The AKIS Coordination Body coordinates and engages in regular exchanges with the responsible persons within the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Climate and Environmental Protections, Regions and Water Management. Collected inputs and needs at an administrative level are addressed either in cooperation with other administrative entities (e.g. Ministries, Paying Agency, etc.), through the AKIS Cooperation Platform or other relevant entities.
- The AKIS Coordination Body is also involved in international exchanges within the EU CAP Network General Assembly, the SCAR AKIS WG as well as the Horizon Europe project modernAKIS. Relevant information from these interactions is communicated to the national and ministerial level.
- The AKIS Cooperation Platform operatives regularly exchange and plan activities with the AKIS Coordination Body. Its area of activity is as presented above.
- The AKIS Cooperation Platform also operates the AKIS Community of Practice (AKIS CoP). The CoP is a mirror group of the Austrian AKIS practice (cf. Fig. 2), representing the diversity of actors (e.g. research, farmers, advisors, educators, young farmers, NGOs, CAP Network etc.) active in the Austrian AKIS.

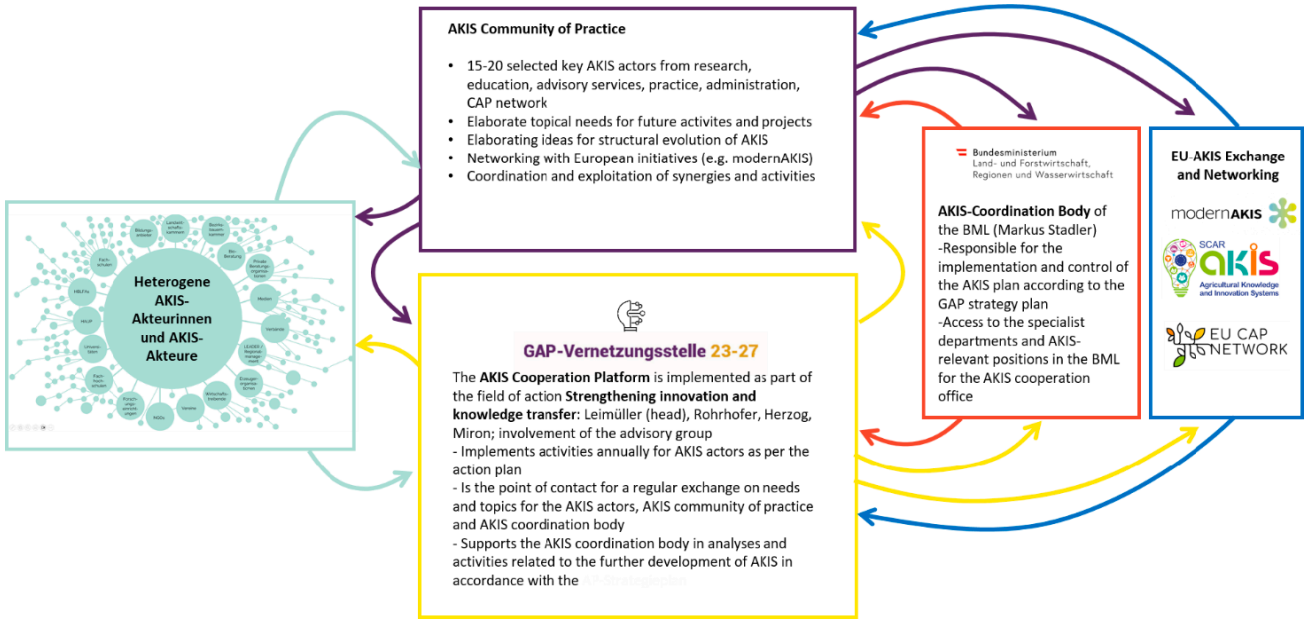
It acts as a source of ideas and discussion for technical, structural and interaction-oriented activities for the future development of the AKIS. It is composed of 16 permanent key AKIS actors. Relevant departments in the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Climate and Environmental Protections, Regions and Water Management are involved in the CoP in addition to the 16 persons. Sectoral representatives are invited as needed for each meeting.

Regular members of the CoP:

- receive updates on different areas of AKIS and committees/groups/organisations that are active in the AKIS
- contribute suggestions for activities different groups deliver in the context of the AKIS
- form new networks or better connect existing ones
- reflect and decide
- on how to help existing resources to become more effective/efficient through better coordination and, where appropriate, joint, synergistic processing
- on support for the AKIS Cooperation Body and the Cooperation Platform in relevant AKIS matters (if necessary, also through cooperation in the annual work programme)
- on the design and influence of new measures and activities required by the Austrian AKIS and participate in their implementation if necessary
- on how to incorporate input and needs identified in the CoP in their own area of work
- participate in international exchanges via the modernAKIS project
- The AKIS Cooperation Platform organises a maximum of 4 meetings per year for the CoP, of which 50% are online; participation in the CoP is by invitation and is expected to be a long-term involvement by the actors in the interest of continuity, quality and depth of exchange; the CoP members are also expected to provide active and constructive contributions to discussions on the further development of the AKI



Fig. 2: Interplay of different AKIS coordination and exchange bodies in Austria



PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR REPLICABILITY

- Early consideration of functions or the CAP network.
- Requirement in the tendering process for the CAP network (if applicable) and yearly allocated funding.
- Clear interaction and working mechanisms between the AKIS CB, the Cooperation Platform and the key AKIS actors (the CoP).

BENEFITS

- Because the AKIS Cooperation Platform is part of the CAP network, it embeds relevant knowledge and activities in this very important networking function of the AKIS system.
- The continuous involvement of key AKIS actors in collaboration with the CAP network and the AKIS CB promises to deliver relevant synergies but also create better aligned activities and more transparent knowledge flows.
- The connection between national and international level will aid the transfer of good practices as well as the embedding of European requirements.

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- Austria CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027, https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/cap-my-country/cap-strategic-plans/austria_en (ENG)
- "A sustainable knowledge and innovation system for Austrian agriculture, Idea paper for the development of the Austrian AKIS", Part of public tender call documentation (AT)
- I2connect AKIS Country Report – Austria, https://meteodocs.llkc.lv/index.php/s/kH6aM8zGnPeB7mn/download (ENG)

Austria

Coordination Body, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Climate and Environmental Protections, Regions and Water Management:
DI Markus Stadler
Markus.Stadler@bmluk.gv.at
Coordinator Austrian CAP Network:
DI Sophia Glanz,
Sophia.Glanz@zukunftsraumland.at

modernAKIS Together for Systems' Innovation

AKIS Coordination Body

AKIS-in-Practice! 1.17

AKIS Coordination body in Romania

Keywords/Tags

Governance

AKIS Coordination body

Potential users

Managing authorities of the CAP Strategic Plan

AKIS Cordination bodies

AKIS context

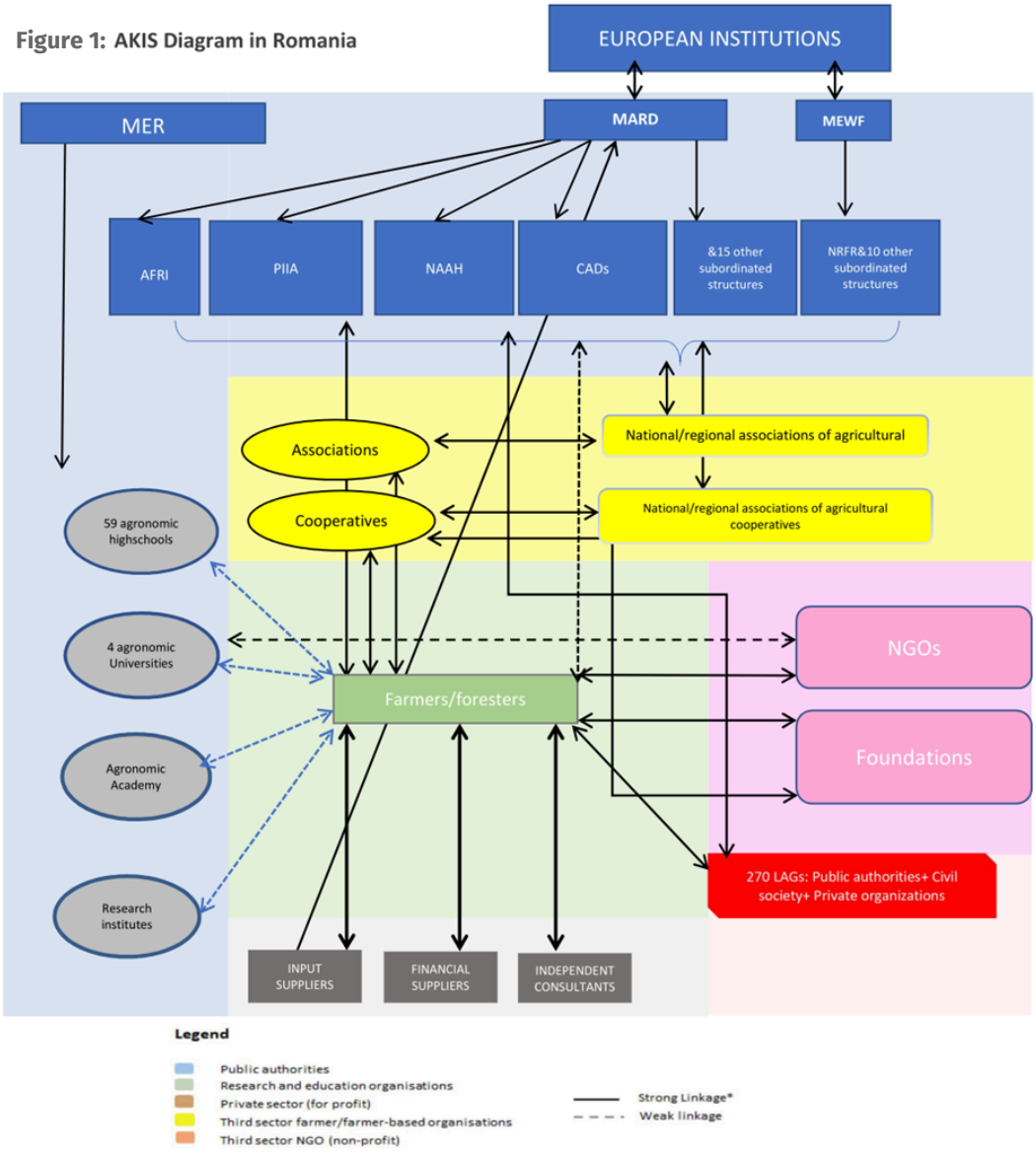
The Romanian Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS) is a complex network (figure 1), bringing together a wide range of stakeholders for the creation, dissemination, and utilization of knowledge and innovation in the agricultural and forestry sector.

The system has long suffered from weak coordination, and limited integration. Agricultural research, education, advisory services, private sector firms, farmer-based organizations, and NGOs largely function as separate sub-systems, with state policies shaping and regulating their interactions. Although many actors are active at the national level, they remain poorly integrated, and operate in isolation/independently from one another. At farm level, many farms continue to operate with traditional structures, and the uptake of innovation and digitalisation remains limited, particularly in rural and mountainous areas.

Within the system, agricultural advisory is considered a key element, playing a catalytic role in the flow of information between AKIS actors—especially between farmers and the research community. Despite this, advisory services remain underdeveloped, with uneven territorial coverage and variable quality.

The CAP Strategic Plan (2023–2027) acknowledges these structural and functional weaknesses and foresees both institutional reforms and digital tools to strengthen the AKIS.

Figure 1: AKIS Diagram in Romania



Source: i2connect (2024)

RATIONALE

The political relevance given to AKIS strategies in the context of the CAP Strategic Plans (SPs) 2023-2027 has certainly highlighted the opportunity of defining governance bodies aimed at coordinating the AKIS-relating interventions and actors in view of their better implementation and contribution to the cross-cutting and specific objectives of the CAP SPs. Particularly, the AKIS coordination body is indicated by the CAP SP 2023-2027 as a point of contact of the European Commission and the European CAP Network.

Every managing authority of the CAP SPs identified the configurations that best fit the needs for governance of the AKISs and the expectations of the respective actors.

In Romania, the AKIS coordination body was set up in line with the regulatory requirements and objectives of the AKIS strategy as delineated in Chapter 8 of the national CAP SP 2023-2027.

IN PRACTICE

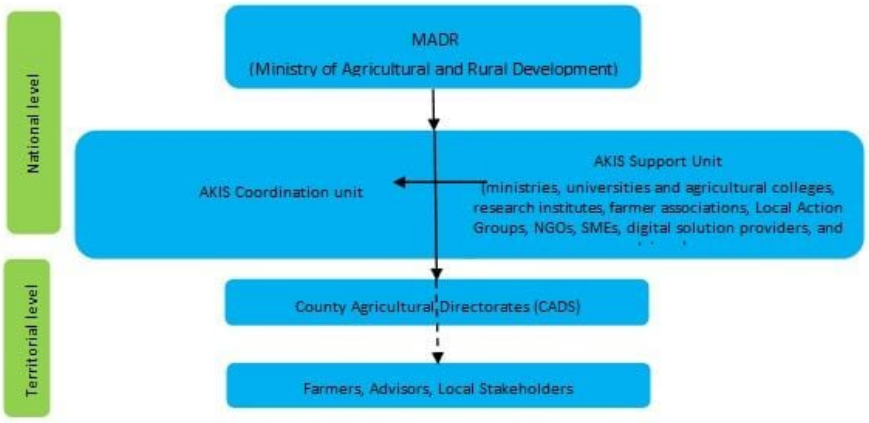
1. Who is the AKIS CB

The AKIS Coordination Body is the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MADR), through the Directorate General for Rural Development – Managing Authority for the CAP Strategic Plan..(Figure 1).

2. Composition of the AKIS CB

The AKIS coordination body encompasses the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MADR) and an AKIS Support Unit, which brings together a wide range of relevant stakeholders including ministries, universities and agricultural colleges, research institutes, farmer associations, Local Action Groups, NGOs, SMEs, digital solution providers, and advisors. At territorial level, the MADR is represented by the County Agricultural Directorates (CADs), which serve as local extensions of the Coordination Body, ensuring that regional needs are collected and channelled into national AKIS decision-making (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Romania AKIS Coordination structure



Source: authors' elaborations based on CAP SP.

3. Functions attributed to the AKIS CB

he Romanian AKIS Coordination Body is responsible for the development, implementation, and monitoring of the AKIS strategy as defined in the CAP Strategic Plan 2023–2027. Its main functions include:

- Strategic planning and governance: developing AKIS strategy, defining AKIS actors, their roles and responsibilities, and ensuring that AKIS activities and output aligned with the objectives of the CAP Strategic Plan.
- Coordination and integration: coordinating AKIS activities with those of National Rural Network, and linking research, education, advisory services, farmers' associations, and private actors to overcome fragmentation and strengthen knowledge flows.
- Support to knowledge and innovation transfer: organising consultations with stakeholders, collecting topics for training, counselling, and research, and ensuring their translation into practice.
- Collaboration with the National Rural Network: coordinating advisory and innovation activities with the Network to enhance partnerships, demonstration farms, training for advisors, and dissemination of project results.
- Management of the AKIS digital platform: ensuring the integration of research outputs, catalogues of advisors and training providers, and interactive services for farmers and stakeholders.
- Advisory services oversight: supervising the selection, training, and quality assurance of advisors, while maintaining confidentiality and impartiality in the services delivered.
- Innovation support: facilitating the establishment of EIP-AGRI Operational Groups, acting as a broker between farmers, researchers, and businesses, and supporting participation in Horizon Europe and other research initiatives.

Through these functions, the AKIS Coordination Body serves as the central contact point for knowledge exchange, ensuring that research and innovation are translated into practical solutions for farmers and rural communities.

4. Procedures for interplaying with other AKIS actors and with the MA of the CAP SP

The procedures for interplaying and the main activities of the Romanian AKIS Coordination Body are set out in the CAP Strategic Plan (2023–2027) and implemented through the annual work plans of the Coordination Unit.

The MADR, through the Directorate General for Rural Development, organises meetings and ensures structured interaction with AKIS actors. The Coordination Unit and Support Unit meet regularly to validate themes for training, advisory services, and innovation. The County Agricultural Directorates act as local contact points, gathering feedback from farmers and advisors on a continuous basis and channelling it to the national level.

The National Rural Network organises annual events and thematic workshops dedicated to AKIS, supporting exchanges among advisors, Operational Groups, and research actors. In addition, the Coordination Unit holds regular consultations with universities, research institutes, and farmer organisations to strengthen the integration of research outputs into practice.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR REPLICABILITY

- Simple and adapted to the reality and level of institutional development of a centralized system (designation of the MADR, as both the AKIS CB and Managing Authority of the CAP SP).
- Multi-layer governance model (Coordination Unit, Support Unit, County Agricultural Directorates) ensuring top-down coordination with bottom-up feedback.
- Separation of competences and clear definition of responsibilities/roles between the AKIS Coordination Unit (strategy, monitoring, CAP Network liaison), the AKIS Support Unit (multi-actor participation and validation), and the County Agricultural Directorates (territorial implementation and feedback).
- Clear internal procedures for meetings, coordination, validation, and rules of operation.
- Development of an AKIS digital platform as a central tool for integrating research results, cataloguing advisors, training providers, and services for farmers.
- Transparent selection and training of advisors, ensuring impartiality, territorial coverage, and tailored services, with access managed through an AKIS digital platform.

BENEFITS

- This configuration of the AKIS CB brings together actors that are already playing some institutional and operational key functions/activities within the regional AKIS.
- Wide representation of the regional AKIS actors.
- Improved coordination of knowledge flows: The Coordination and Support Units promotes structured communication between research, education, and advisory services, facilitating better alignment of activities and priorities.
- Enhanced multi-actor participation: The Support Unit enables broad stakeholder involvement – including research institutes, universities, farmer associations, NGOs, and digital providers – fostering cooperation and co-creation of knowledge.
- Digital access: The AKIS digital platform improves access to research results, advisory services, training opportunities, and other services, making the AKIS more transparent and efficient.
- Improved advisory quality: Transparent selection, training, and accreditation of advisors enhance service quality, impartiality, and coverage across rural areas.
- Territorial representation and feedback: County Agricultural Directorates ensure that local farmers' needs and field-level experiences inform national AKIS strategies.

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- Romania CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027, https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/cap-my-country/cap-strategic-plans/romania_en
- I2connect AKIS Country Report -Romania, https://meteodocs.llkc.lv/index.php/s/QY6XgzB2pyMwCLG#pdfviewer

Romania

Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MADR):
Bogdan Alecu
bogdan.alecu@madr.ro

modernAKIS Together for Systems' Innovation

AKIS Coordination Body

AKIS-in-Practice! 1.18

AKIS Coordination body in Malta

Keywords/Tags

- Governance
- AKIS Coordination body

Potential users

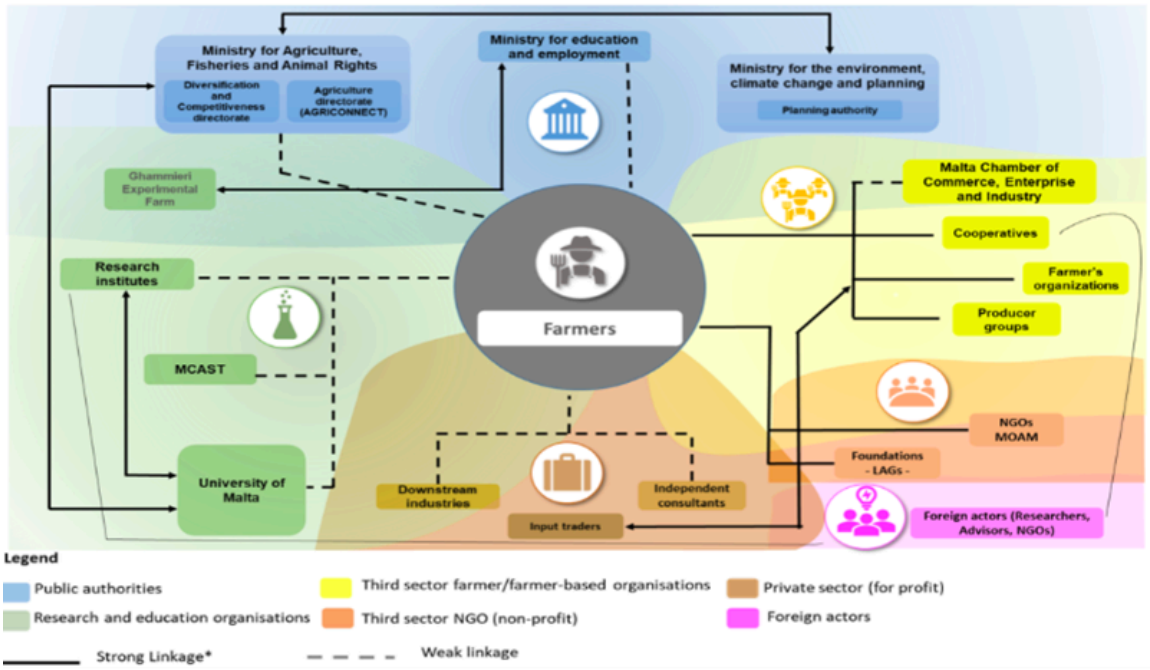
- Managing authorities of the CAP Strategic Plan
- AKIS Cordination bodies
- National and regional ministries of agriculture
- Agriculutral research institues and universities
- Advisory service providers (public and private)
- Farmer associations
- CAP National and EU-level networks

AKIS context

The Maltese Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS) is a small but evolving network that connects key actors involved in agricultural research, education, advisory, and innovation (figure 1). Its overarching goal is to enhance the creation, dissemination, and use of knowledge across the farming and rural community, contributing to sustainable food production and competitiveness. The system is structured around three main pillars — AgriHub (research and innovation), AgriConnect (advisory and training), and AgriKwalita (quality assurance and compliance).

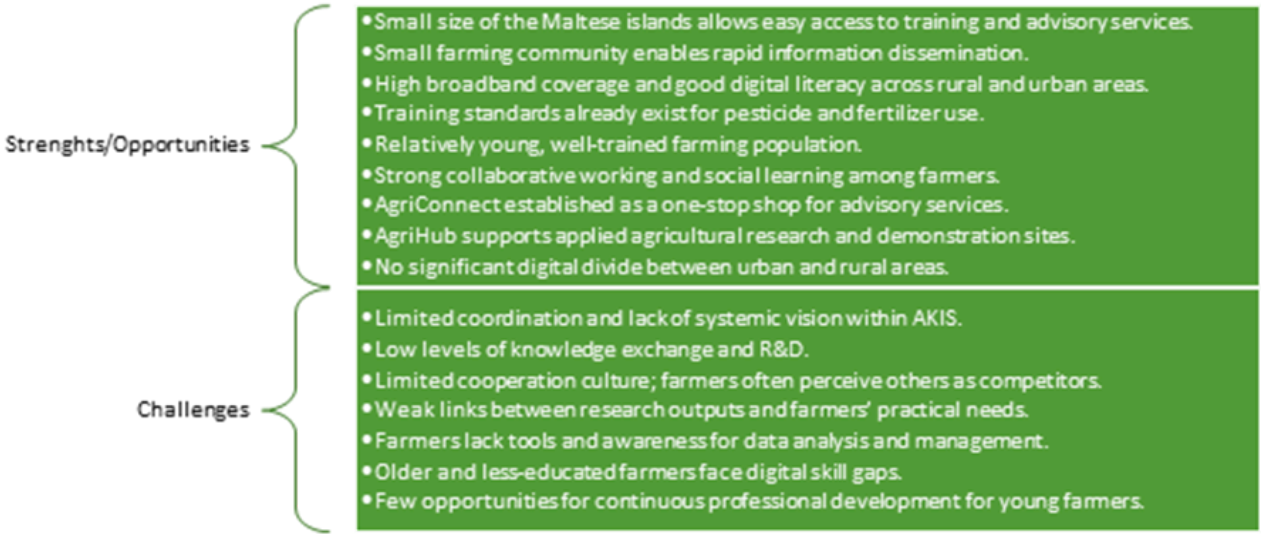
Although the Maltese AKIS benefits from its small size and close institutional cooperation, it continues to face challenges (Figure 1). The CAP Strategic Plan (2023–2027) acknowledges these gaps and provides for the establishment of an AKIS Coordination Body and stronger links with the National CAP Network, to enhance collaboration, digitalisation, and innovation adoption across the agricultural sector.

Figure 1: Maltese AKIS Diagram



Source: i2connect AKIS country report (2021)

Figure 2: Contextual situation of Maltese AKIS



RATIONALE

The political relevance given to AKIS strategies in the context of the CAP Strategic Plans (SPs) 2023-2027 has certainly highlighted the opportunity of defining governance bodies aimed at coordinating the AKIS-relating interventions and actors in view of their better implementation and contribution to the cross-cutting and specific objectives of the CAP SPs. Particularly, the AKIS coordination body is indicated by the CAP SP 2023-2027 as a point of contact of the European Commission and the European CAP Network.
Every managing authority of the CAP SPs identified the configurations that best fit the needs for governance of the AKISs and the expectations of the respective actors.
In Malta, the AKIS coordination body was set up in line with the regulatory requirements and objectives of the AKIS strategy as delineated in Chapter 8 of the national CAP SP 2023-2027.

IN PRACTICE

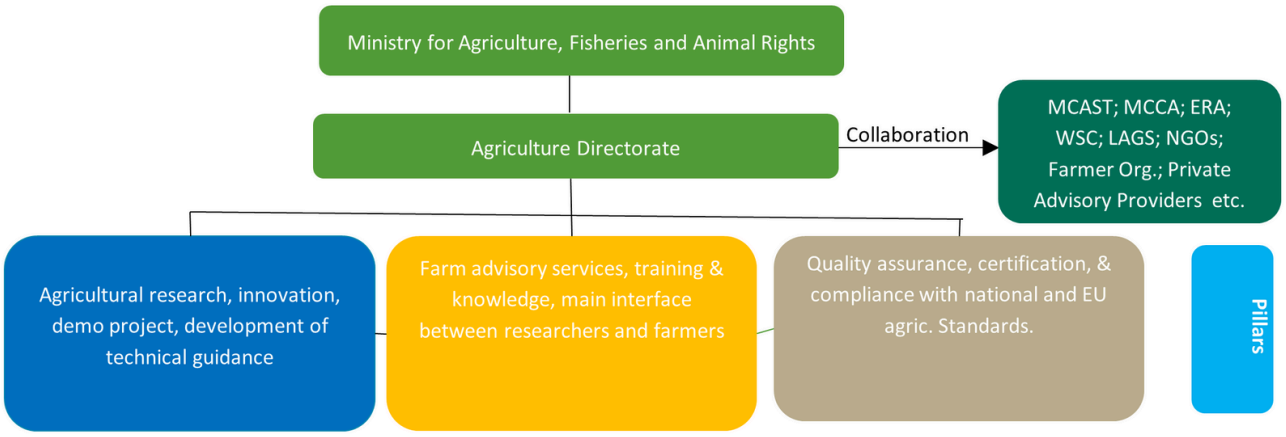
1. Who is the AKIS CB

The AKIS Coordination body is the Agricultural Directorate within the Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries, and Animal Rights.

2. Composition of the AKIS CB

The AKIS Coordination Body encompasses the Agriculture Directorate within the Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries and Animal Rights (MAFA). The Agriculture Directorate is organised around three main operational units, and closely collaboration with other national institutions (Figure 2).

Figure 3. Maltese AKIS Coordination structure



Source: Authors elaboration.

3. Functions attributed to the AKIS CB

The AKIS Coordination Body is responsible for the overall coordination, integration, and governance of Malta's AKIS. Its main functions include:

- Strategic coordination of all AKIS components — AgriHub, AgriConnect, and AgriKwalita — to ensure coherence between research, advisory, and quality assurance activities.
- Implementation of the AKIS-related interventions under the CAP Strategic Plan (2023–2027), including knowledge transfer, advisory services, and support for innovation and digitalisation.
- Facilitation of cooperation among key national institutions and stakeholders such as the University of Malta, MCAST, MCST, MCCAA, ERA, WSC, farmer organisations, NGOs, and private advisory providers.
- Promotion of knowledge exchange and innovation uptake, ensuring that research results are translated into practical solutions for farmers and rural actors.
- Capacity building and training, particularly through AgriConnect, to enhance advisory competences and farmers' technical skills.
- Monitoring and evaluation of advisory performance and knowledge transfer activities, contributing to evidence-based policy adjustments.
- Support for the establishment of the National CAP Network's AKIS activities, encouraging stakeholder participation, thematic workshops, and dissemination of good practices.

These functions position the Maltese AKIS Coordination Body as the central mechanism for linking policy, research, education, and practice, fostering an integrated and innovation-oriented agricultural sector.

4. Procedures for interplaying with other AKIS actors and with the MA of the CAP SP

The procedures for interplaying and the main activities of the Maltese AKIS Coordination Body are defined in the CAP Strategic Plan (2023–2027) and guided by internal coordination mechanisms and continuous exchanges among relevant stakeholders, under the coordination of the Agriculture Directorate within the Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries and Animal Rights (MAFA).

- The Directorate ensures structured collaboration among its three operational units — AgriHub, AgriConnect, and AgriKwalita — and with key AKIS actors.
- Collaboration with AKIS actors — including the University of Malta, Malta College for Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST), Malta Council for Science and Technology (MCST), Malta Competition and Consumer Affairs Authority (MCCAA), Environment and Resources Authority (ERA), and Water Services Corporation (WSC) — takes place through project-based partnerships, information-sharing platforms, and joint initiatives supporting innovation and capacity-building in agriculture.

- The Directorate maintains continuous communication and coordination with the Managing Authority of the CAP Strategic Plan to ensure the effective implementation of AKIS-related interventions, including advisory services, research, training, and knowledge transfer. Regular technical meetings and consultations are organised to align priorities and monitor progress.
- The National CAP Network facilitates exchanges among AKIS actors by organising thematic workshops, networking events, and knowledge dissemination activities. Farmer organisations, cooperatives, NGOs, and Local Action Groups (LAGs) contribute through bottom-up feedback mechanisms, ensuring that field-level experiences inform policy and advisory planning at the national level.

These mechanisms collectively ensure continuous dialogue, coordination, and mutual learning between the AKIS Coordination Body, the Managing Authority, and all AKIS actors, strengthening the integration of research, innovation, and practice across Malta's agricultural sector.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR REPLICABILITY

The Maltese AKIS model demonstrates how a centralised and compact governance structure can effectively coordinate knowledge, innovation, and advisory functions within a small-scale agricultural system. Its design offers valuable lessons for countries or regions with limited agricultural area, small number of actors, and a strong central administration.

The set-up of such an AKIS Coordination Body requires:

- A clearly defined institutional framework, in which a single authority — the Agriculture Directorate within MAFA — oversees coordination and integration across research, advisory, and quality assurance functions.
- Functional operational units (AgriHub, AgriConnect, AgriKwalita) with distinct yet complementary roles to ensure seamless flow of knowledge from research to practice.
- Active collaboration mechanisms among research institutions (University of Malta, MCAST, MCST) and advisory services to align technical training and innovation delivery.
- Digital platforms and one-stop advisory systems (e.g. AgriConnect) to facilitate efficient communication and service delivery to farmers.
- Continuous feedback loops from farmers, cooperatives, and Local Action Groups to inform policy and improve advisory relevance.

This integrated and centralised approach can be replicated in other small or insular regions where strong institutional leadership, compact governance, and digital infrastructure can compensate for limited scale and resources, ensuring efficient coordination and effective knowledge transfer across the agricultural sector.

BENEFITS

- Centralised governance and coordination: A single coordination body — the Agriculture Directorate within MAFA — ensures policy coherence and effective integration between research, advisory, and quality assurance functions.
- Efficient knowledge transfer: The establishment of AgriConnect as a one-stop advisory platform facilitates the direct exchange of information between farmers, advisors, and research institutions, reducing fragmentation and duplication.
- Enhanced research–practice linkages: Through AgriHub, applied research and demonstration projects promote innovation and ensure that research outputs are translated into practical solutions for farmers.
- Improved training and capacity building: Collaboration with the University of Malta, MCAST, and MCST strengthens education, vocational training, and the digital skills of both advisors and farmers.
- Quality assurance and compliance: AgriKwalita contributes to maintaining high agricultural standards, supporting food safety, sustainability, and alignment with EU requirements.
- Effective use of digitalisation: High broadband coverage and digital literacy across Malta enable efficient advisory delivery and data-driven innovation across rural and urban areas.
- Stronger stakeholder collaboration: The integration of farmer organisations, cooperatives, NGOs, and Local Action Groups (LAGs) within AKIS activities ensures inclusivity, bottom-up participation, and continuous feedback into policy and practice.

Overall, the Maltese AKIS model enhances efficiency, coordination, and innovation transfer within a small-scale farming system, serving as an example of how compact governance can maximise impact and resource use.

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- Malta CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027, https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/cap-my-country/cap-strategic-plans/malta_en.
- I2connect AKIS Country Report -Malta, https://i2connect-h2020.eu/resources/akis-country-reports/.
- https://api.akisconnect.eu/uploads/MS%20cards/Malta/Malta_akis-cards.pdf.

Malta

Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries and Animal
agriconnect.mafa@gov.mt

modernAKIS Together for Systems' Innovation

AKIS Coordination Body

AKIS-in-Practice! 1.19

AKIS Coordination body in Bulgaria

Keywords/Tags

- Governance
- AKIS Coordination body

Potential users

- Managing authorities of the CAP Strategic Plan
- AKIS Cordination bodies
- National and regional ministries of agriculture
- Agriculutral research institues and universities
- Advisory service providers (public and private)
- Farmer associations
- CAP National and EU-level networks

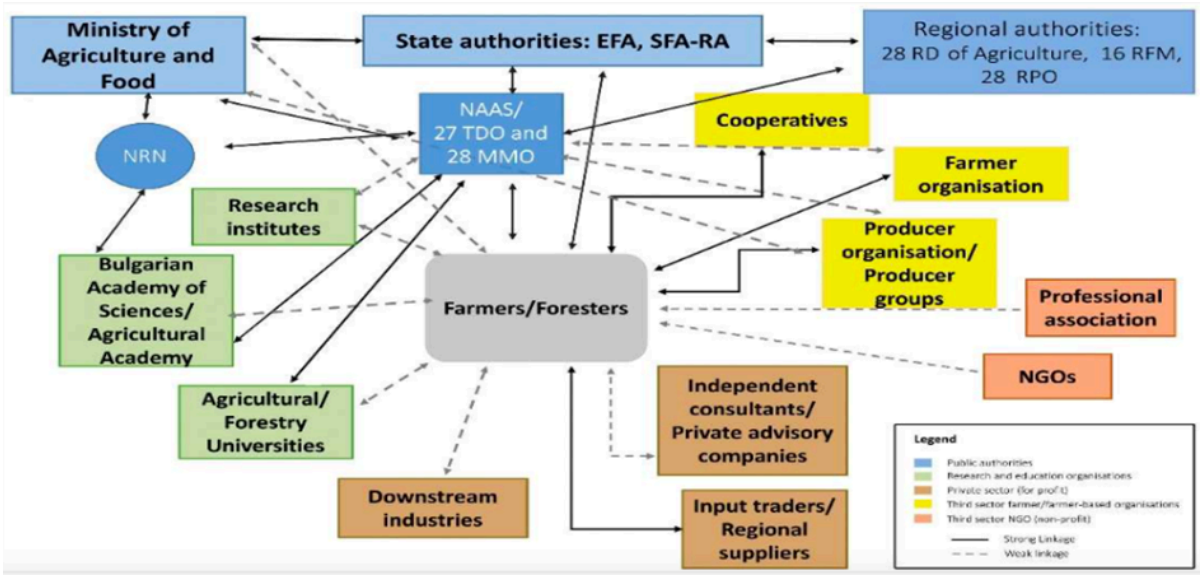
AKIS context

The Bulgarian Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS) is a complex network (Figure. 1) that brings together wide range of actors to promote innovation, knowledge transfer, and sustainable development in agriculture and rural areas.

The system remains largely publicly funded and policy-driven with key institutions having a solid technical foundation. Despite this, the AKIS faces challenges of weak coordination and fragmented knowledge flows between research, education, and practice.

Advisory services are unevenly distributed, and cooperation between scientific institutions and farmers remains limited. The CAP Strategic Plan (2023–2027) acknowledges these structural and functional weaknesses and foresees both institutional reforms and digital tools to strengthen the AKIS. Currently, the Bulgarian AKIS is evolving from a fragmented structure towards a more integrated, digital, and participatory model.

Figure 1: Bulgaria AKIS Diagram



Source: i2connect AKIS country report (2024)

RATIONALE

The political relevance given to AKIS strategies in the context of the CAP Strategic Plans (SPs) 2023-2027 has certainly highlighted the opportunity of defining governance bodies aimed at coordinating the AKIS-relating interventions and actors in view of their better implementation and contribution to the cross-cutting and specific objectives of the CAP SPs. Particularly, the AKIS coordination body is indicated by the CAP SP 2023-2027 as a point of contact of the European Commission and the European CAP Network.

Every managing authority of the CAP SPs identified the configurations that best fit the needs for governance of the AKISs and the expectations of the respective actors.

In Bulgaria, the AKIS coordination body was set up in line with the regulatory requirements and objectives of the AKIS strategy as delineated in Chapter 8 of the national CAP SP 2023-2027.

IN PRACTICE

1. Who is the AKIS CB

The AKIS Coordination Body is the Ministry of Agriculture and Food (MAF), specifically through the Rural Development Directorate, which functions as the Managing Authority (MA) for the CAP Strategic Plan (2023–2027).

2. Composition of the AKIS CB

The AKIS Coordination Body (CB) encompasses the Ministry of Agriculture and Food (MAF) through its Rural Development Directorate, which serves as the Managing Authority for the CAP Strategic Plan. The CB works in close cooperation with other national institutions and key AKIS actors, including the National Agricultural Advisory Service (NAAS), the Agricultural Academy, State Fund Agriculture / Paying Agency, agricultural universities and research institutes, farmer associations, producer organisations, Local Action Groups (LAGs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and private advisory providers.

At the regional level, the CB is represented by the Regional Directorates "Agriculture", which act as local contact points. These directorates ensure that regional needs and experiences are communicated to the national level, fostering a two-way exchange of information and supporting coordinated implementation of AKIS activities across the country.

3. Functions attributed to the AKIS CB

The AKIS Coordination Body is responsible for the overall coordination, integration, and governance of Malta's AKIS.

Its main functions include:

- Strategic coordination of all AKIS components to ensure effective interaction between the NAAS, the Agricultural Academy, the CAP Network, and other knowledge providers, fostering a coherent and integrated system of research, innovation, and advisory support.
- Implementation of AKIS-related interventions under the CAP Strategic Plan, including knowledge transfer measures, advisory and training activities, and support for the creation and operation of EIP-AGRI Operational Groups.
- Facilitation of cooperation and communication among key national actors — including NAAS, the Agricultural Academy, State Fund Agriculture/Paying Agency, agricultural universities, farmer organisations, Local Action Groups (LAGs), NGOs, and private advisory providers — to strengthen linkages between science, policy, and practice.
- Development and maintenance of the Interactive Online AKIS Information Platform, which centralises data on advisors, researchers, innovation projects, training materials, and Horizon Europe opportunities, ensuring transparency and accessibility for all stakeholders.
- Promotion of knowledge exchange and innovation uptake through the organisation of joint events, demonstration farms, interactive workshops, and thematic working groups involving farmers, researchers, and advisors.
- Capacity building and continuous training of advisors and stakeholders through regular seminars, online and face-to-face courses, and the annual national conference of advisors, to enhance professional competences and interactive innovation skills.
- Monitoring, reporting, and evaluation of AKIS activities, including the performance of advisory services, innovation outcomes, and the effectiveness of knowledge transfer mechanisms, to inform evidence-based adjustments in policy and implementation.

- Support for digitalisation and smart agriculture, aligning with Bulgaria's Strategy for the Digitalisation of Agriculture and Rural Areas (2019–2030), and collaborating with European Digital Innovation Hubs (EDIHs) to promote the adoption of digital tools and technologies.
- Strengthening of regional and local AKIS structures through cooperation with the Regional Directorates "Agriculture" and NAAS district and municipal offices, ensuring two-way communication between national and local levels.
- Liaison with European and international innovation frameworks, including EIP-AGRI, Horizon Europe, and ModernAKIS, to connect Bulgarian actors with European innovation networks, operational groups, and best practices.

These functions establish the Bulgarian AKIS Coordination Body as the central mechanism linking policy, research, education, advisory services, and practice, ensuring that innovation, knowledge, and digital transformation reach all levels of the agricultural sector — from national institutions to local farmers and rural communities.

4. Procedures for interplaying with other AKIS actors and with the MA of the CAP SP

The procedures for interplaying and the main activities of the Bulgarian AKIS Coordination Body (CB) are defined in the CAP Strategic Plan (2023–2027) and implemented under the supervision of the MAF through its Directorate for Rural Development, which also serves as the Managing Authority (MA). The CB organises regular coordination meetings and ensures structured interaction with AKIS actors to align activities with CAP objectives.

The NAAS, Agricultural Academy, State Fund Agriculture/Paying Agency, and CAP Network Management Unit cooperate closely with the CB in planning and implementing AKIS-related interventions. The CB and these institutions jointly identify training needs, develop advisory themes, and promote innovation and digitalisation in agriculture.

At the regional level, the Regional Directorates "Agriculture" act as local contact points, working with NAAS district and municipal offices to organise training, demonstration activities, and information events. They gather feedback from farmers and advisors and channel it to the national level, ensuring two-way communication between local practice and policy.

The CAP Network supports interaction and knowledge sharing among AKIS stakeholders through annual events, thematic workshops, and dissemination of best practices. The CB also maintains regular cooperation with universities, research institutes, farmer organisations, and NGOs to strengthen the integration of research results into practical solutions for the farming community.

In addition, the CB participates in EU-level exchanges within the CAP Network, SCAR AKIS Working Group, and the Horizon Europe project ModernAKIS, ensuring that international knowledge and experience are shared and adapted to Bulgaria's agricultural context

4. Procedures for interplaying with other AKIS actors and with the MA of the CAP SP

The procedures for interplaying and the main activities of the Bulgarian AKIS Coordination Body (CB) are defined in the CAP Strategic Plan (2023–2027) and implemented under the supervision of the MAF through its Directorate for Rural Development, which also serves as the Managing Authority (MA). The CB organises regular coordination meetings and ensures structured interaction with AKIS actors to align activities with CAP objectives.

The NAAS, Agricultural Academy, State Fund Agriculture/Paying Agency, and CAP Network Management Unit cooperate closely with the CB in planning and implementing AKIS-related interventions. The CB and these institutions jointly identify training needs, develop advisory themes, and promote innovation and digitalisation in agriculture.

At the regional level, the Regional Directorates "Agriculture" act as local contact points, working with NAAS district and municipal offices to organise training, demonstration activities, and information events. They gather feedback from farmers and advisors and channel it to the national level, ensuring two-way communication between local practice and policy.

The CAP Network supports interaction and knowledge sharing among AKIS stakeholders through annual events, thematic workshops, and dissemination of best practices. The CB also maintains regular cooperation with universities, research institutes, farmer organisations, and NGOs to strengthen the integration of research results into practical solutions for the farming community.

In addition, the CB participates in EU-level exchanges within the CAP Network, SCAR AKIS Working Group, and the Horizon Europe project ModernAKIS, ensuring that international knowledge and experience are shared and adapted to Bulgaria's agricultural context.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR REPLICABILITY

- Simple and adapted to the reality and level of institutional development of a centralized governance system (designation of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food, through its Directorate for Rural Development, as both the AKIS CB and the Managing Authority of the CAP SP 2023–2027).
- Multi-level governance model combining national coordination (MAF/CB), regional implementation (Regional Directorates "Agriculture"), and local outreach (NAAS district and municipal offices), enabling effective top-down coordination and bottom-up feedback from farmers and advisors.
- Clearly defined roles and responsibilities among AKIS actors:

1. The Coordination Body oversees strategic planning, monitoring, and CAP Network linkages.
2. The National Agricultural Advisory Service (NAAS) and the Agricultural Academy lead operational implementation, training, and research transfer.
3. The Regional Directorates "Agriculture" and Local Action Groups (LAGs) ensure territorial application and feedback from local stakeholders.Structured internal procedures for coordination, including regular meetings, annual conferences of advisors, thematic working groups, and joint planning with the CAP Network and Paying Agency.

- Structured internal procedures for coordination, including regular meetings, annual conferences of advisors, thematic working groups, and joint planning with the CAP Network and Paying Agency.

Development of a national Interactive Online AKIS Information Platform as the core digital tool for coordinating actors, integrating research results, cataloguing advisors, and sharing training materials, innovation projects, and Horizon Europe opportunities.

Transparent advisory system under the coordination of NAAS, combining public and private advisory providers, supported by continuous training (minimum 32 hours per year) to ensure competence, impartiality, and equal access to advisory services across all regions.

Strong integration with European innovation frameworks, including participation in EIP-AGRI, ModernAKIS, and the EU CAP Network, allowing replication of effective practices and the transfer of innovations into the national context.

BENEFITS

- Streamlined coordination and policy coherence achieved through the integration of the AKIS CB within the MAF, ensuring that AKIS activities, advisory services, and CAP interventions are aligned under a single institutional framework.
- Clear division of roles and responsibilities among the National Agricultural Advisory Service (NAAS), Agricultural Academy, CAP Network, and Regional Directorates “Agriculture”, reduces overlap and improves collaboration.
- Improved knowledge flow and communication through structured coordination meetings, thematic working groups, and the Interactive Online AKIS Information Platform, which centralises data and facilitates access to innovation results.
- Enhanced regional outreach via the involvement of Regional Directorates “Agriculture” and NAAS district offices, providing direct support to farmers and collecting bottom-up feedback for continuous improvement.
- Strengthened advisory capacity and professionalism through regular training, workshops, and an annual conference of advisors, ensuring consistent quality and updated technical expertise.
- Enhanced participation in European innovation frameworks, including EIP-AGRI, SCAR AKIS Working Group, and ModernAKIS, increasing Bulgaria’s visibility and exchange within the EU AKIS community and supporting the transfer of good practices.

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- Bulgria CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027, https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/cap-my-country/cap-strategic-plans/bulgaria_en.
- I2connect AKIS Country Report -Malta, https://meteodocs.llkc.lv/index.php/s/j32w242ZaYsRJ5E#pdfviewer.
- https://akisconnect.eu/member-states-in-action/member-state?name=Bulgaria.

Bulgaria

National Agricultural Advisory Service
office@naas.government.bg

modernAKIS Together for Systems' Innovation

AKIS Coordination Body

AKIS-in-Practice! 1.20

AKIS Coordination body in Lombardy Region (Italy)

Keywords/Tags

Governance

AKIS Coordination body

Potential users

Managing authorities of the CAP Strategic Plan

AKIS Cordination bodies

AKIS CONTEST

Lombardy Region is characterized by a dense and diversified network of research and innovation actors relevant to the agricultural, agri-food, environmental, and forestry sectors. The regional AKIS includes 9 universities, several national research institutes (CNR, CREA, ENR, Istituto Spallanzani), regional foundations (Fojanini, Minoprio, FLA), and the regional agency for agricultural and forestry services (ERSAF), together with a widespread system of experimental farms supporting demonstration and knowledge-exchange activities.

During the 2014–2020 programming period, 30 advisory bodies employing over 200 advisors were officially recognized, alongside around 15 accredited vocational training centres.

The regional AKIS strategy is framed within the Regional Strategic Programme for Research, Innovation and Technology Transfer (PSTIRTT 2021–2023), aligned with the principles of Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI) that is, participatory planning through the involvement of local stakeholders and citizens.

Within this framework, the AKIS aims to strengthen knowledge flows and cooperation among research, advisory, training, and farming actors by promoting the synergic implementation of CAP interventions, supporting back-office services and advisor training (implemented through ERSAF), and fostering participatory innovation approaches such as EIP-AGRI Operational Groups. Particular attention is given to ensuring coherence with other EU funds (ERDF, ESF, Horizon Europe, Erasmus+), thus promoting an integrated, systemic, and territorial approach to knowledge and innovation for sustainable agriculture and rural development.

RATIONALE

The political relevance given to the AKIS strategies in the context of the Strategic Plans (SP) 2023-2027 of the CAP has certainly highlighted the opportunity to define governance bodies aimed at coordinating AKIS-related interventions and actors in order to better implement them and contribute to achieving the cross-cutting and specific objectives of the CAP SPs.

In particular, the AKIS coordination body is identified by the 2023-2027 SP as the contact point for the European Commission and the European CAP Network.

The Managing Authorities of the CAP Strategic Plans have selected the governance set-ups that best align with their management needs and the expectations of relevant stakeholders.

In Italy, as a result of the new delivery model, and differently from previous programming periods, the CAP SP 2023-2027 is established at the national level only. However, since the Regions/Autonomous Provinces have, by Constitution, the competence in agricultural matters, they have set up Rural Development Complementary Programmes (RDCP), which, within the framework of the National CAP SP, have their own governance and implement interventions that are relevant to their specific territories.

The general model of AKIS coordination bodies for Italy is indicated by the CAP SP that mentions a mix of "institutions that have the responsibility/capacity to provide training, advisory services, research, information". Lately, in mid-2024, the Ministry of Agriculture established a national AKIS coordination model which calls for a collective body, composed by representatives of the variety of key AKIS actors.

Under this national framework, the Lombardia Region has established a Regional AKIS Coordination Body for the RDCP 2023-2027.

IN PRACTICE

The AKIS Regional Coordination Body for the Lombardia RDCP 2023/27 was established by a decree of the regional government (Resolution no. XII/4186 of April 7, 2025) according to Regulation (EU) No. 2021/2115 and consistently with the national model set by the referring Italian ministerial decree (see AKIS-in-Practice 1.13).

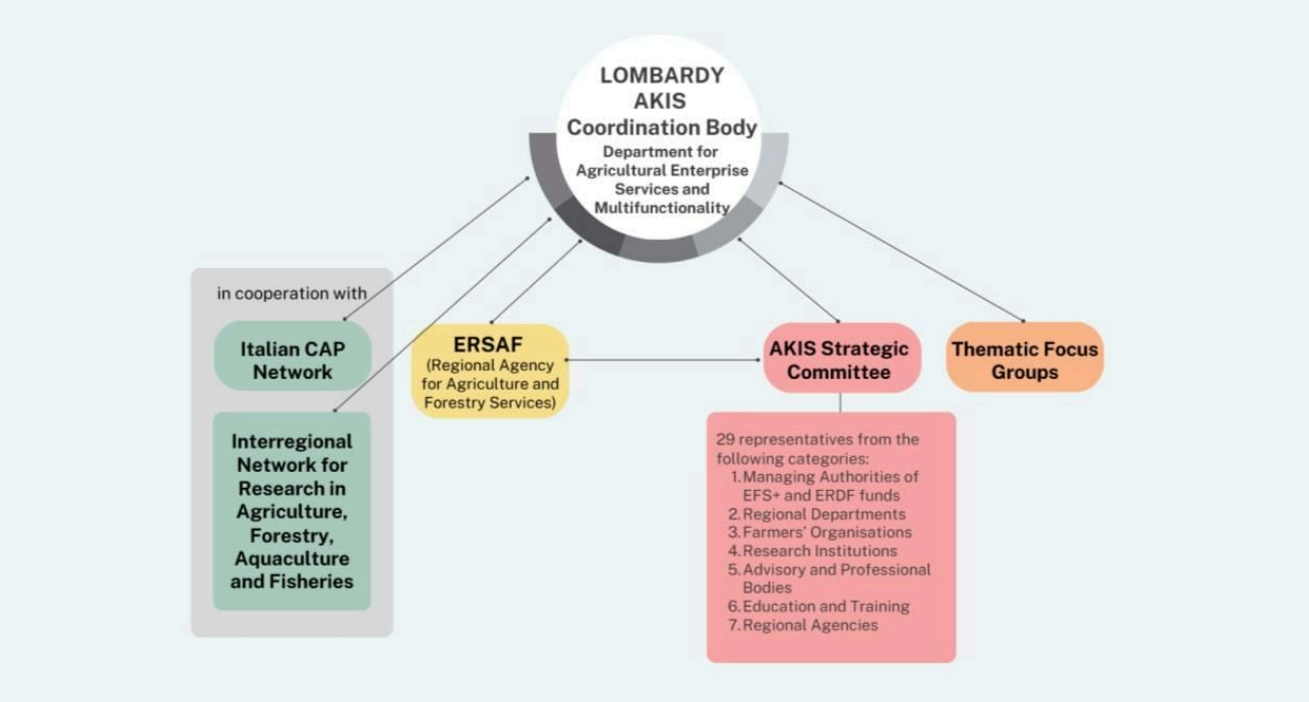
1. Who is the AKIS CB

In Lombardy, the AKIS Coordination Body operates under the regional Department for Agricultural Enterprise Services and Multifunctionality, delegated by the regional Managing Authority (MA).

The AKIS CB relies on the operational support of **ERSAF** (Regional Agency for Agricultural and Forestry Services) and cooperates closely with the **AKIS Strategic Committee**, which ensures a participatory and multi-actor approach to defining priorities and needs. (Figure. 1).

2. Composition of the AKIS CB

Figure 1: Composition of the Regional AKIS Coordination Body of Lombardy Region



Source: Authors' elaborations based on Lombardia Regional Decree n. 9974 of 14/07/2025.

The composition of the AKIS Strategic Committee includes 29 representatives from the following categories:

Managing Authorities	Managing Authority for the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)
	Managing Authority for the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)
Regional Departments	Central Directorate for the NRRP, Olympic Games and Digitalization
	General Directorate for Environment and Climate
	General Directorate for Universities, Research and Innovation
	Regional Paying Agency

Farmers' Organisations	Coldiretti
	Confagricoltura
	Italian Farmers Confederation (CIA)
	Confcooperative Lombardia
	Confederation of Agricultural Producers (Copagri)
	Assolombarda
Research Institutions	University of Milan (Departments: DISAA, DeFENS/DISANA, DESP/DISPA, Veterinary Medicine and Animal Sciences)
	Catholic University of the Sacred Heart – Piacenza and Cremona Campus
	Smart AgriFood Observatory – Politecnico di Milano
	CREA – Council for Agricultural Research and Economics
	ISMEA – Institute of Services for the Agricultural and Food Market
	CNR – National Research Council, Institute of Agricultural Biology and Biotechnology (IBBA)
Advisory and Professional Bodies	Regional Professional Associations of Agronomists and Foresters, Veterinary Doctors, Animal Production Scientists, and Food Technologists
Education and Training	Regional School Office – Network of Technical and Vocational Agricultural Institutes
Regional Agencies	ERSAF – Regional Agency for Agriculture and Forestry Services
	ARIA S.p.A. – Regional Agency for Innovation and Procurement
	PoliS-Lombardia – Regional Institute for Research, Statistics and Training

3. Functions attributed to the AKIS CB

The **AKIS Strategic Committee** functions as a steering and consultative committee that brings together representatives of production sectors, research institutions, advisory providers, and training organisations. It supports the design, coordination, and monitoring of knowledge-exchange and innovation activities within the region.

The Table ensures a bottom-up and participatory process for identifying emerging needs and thematic priorities, which can lead to the establishment of Thematic Groups / Focus Groups, that are designed to valorise sectoral or territorial aggregations, promoting the integration of modernisation processes such as training, advisory, and technological innovation, and acting as reference points for AKIS stakeholders at territorial level.

> **Thematic Groups (Focus Groups)** are flexible and temporary consultation units that bring together experts from both the public and private sectors, who contribute their experience and specialised knowledge. Their technical input can serve as a preparatory step for the establishment of **Operational Groups (OGs)**, for the design of **back-office actions**, or for the implementation of **joint initiatives** such as demonstration and experimental activities (e.g. **demofarms**, knowledge exchanges, and information-sharing among AKIS actors).
> They may also contribute to the **monitoring of these activities** and to the **definition of technical aspects** related to other instruments supporting innovation within the regional AKIS framework.

At the regional level, the Strategic Committee performs the following functions:

- **Identify innovation and knowledge-transfer needs** across the Lombardy agricultural system, ensuring alignment with evolving sectoral priorities.
- **Map and regularly update enterprises' innovation needs**, while recognising and promoting those implementing good practices in innovation and sustainability.

- **Foster exchanges among members** to stimulate new approaches and forms of collaboration aimed at the modernisation and digitalisation of the Lombard agri-food system.
- **Support participatory initiatives**—such as laboratories, workshops, and living labs—to share knowledge generated through AKIS-related interventions funded by Regione Lombardia.
- **Ensure vertical coordination** by sharing regional proposals with the National AKIS Coordination Body (CBR) and facilitating the adaptation and implementation of national guidance at regional level.
- **Guarantee a structured participatory process** that allows bottom-up identification of innovation needs and priorities directly from stakeholders and practitioners.
- **Select regional thematic areas** on which to establish Thematic or Focus Groups to provide technical input and guidance.

Beyond the regional scope, the Strategic Table contributes to broader coordination by:

- **Promoting inter-regional and national networking,** fostering alignment among Regions and Autonomous Provinces in defining policy directions and European or national programmes.
- **Facilitating the integration of EU and national innovation policies** across the agricultural, agri-food, and forestry sectors, ensuring coherence with the CAP and Horizon Europe frameworks.
- **Supporting international visibility and networking**, by promoting participation in major innovation events to enhance collaboration and the dissemination of innovative practices at European and global level.

4. Procedures for interplaying with other AKIS actors and with the MA of the CAP SP

For the purposes indicated in art. 8 of the CSP 2023-2027, the regional AKIS coordination body will interface with the Managing Authority of the EAFRD, ESF+ with the national coordination, with the National CAP Network, with the Interregional Network of Agricultural Research Forestry Aquaculture and Fisheries.

The Committee meets at least twice a year, either in person or online, upon the initiative of the National AKIS Coordination Body (CBR) or at the request of its members. Meetings follow an agenda set by the CBR, with the possibility for participants to propose additional topics. A quorum of one third of members is required for meetings to be valid. The Committee may also be consulted by written procedure and expresses advisory opinions on actions to be implemented within the regional AKIS framework.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR REPLICABILITY

The set-up of an AKIS coordination body like this requires

- a formal act of constitution
- the definition of a general legal framework that is recognised by all members of the AKIS coordination body
- a separation of competences, a clear definition of responsibilities and mutual recognition of respective functions (e.g., provision of technical assistance/advisory services, research, innovation support services, administrative controls, monitoring and evaluation, ...) by the members of the AKIS coordination body
- the establishment of internal procedures for coordination meetings and co-decision on action plans to implement the AKIS strategy (internal regulations).

BENEFITS

- Wide representativeness of local key AKS actors
- Capacity to identify the needs of various AKIS stakeholders, facilitated by the establishment of Thematic Groups
- The flexibility of the Thematic Groups provides an additional benefit by allowing for a more tailored and responsive approach to addressing emerging challenges.

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- Rural Development Complementary Programmes – Lombardy Region (IT)
- Resolution no. XII/4186 of April 7, 2025 (IT)
- Decree No. 5855 of April 24, 2025 (IT)

Italy

Department of Agriculture, Rural and Environmental Development (Lombardy Region):

- **Lucia Silvestri –** lucia_silvestri@regione.lombardia.it
- **Giovanna Nicastro –** giovanna_nicastro@regone.lombardia.it
- **Viviana Cavallaro –** viviana_cavallaro@regione.lombardia.it

modernAKIS Together for Systems' Innovation

AKIS Coordination Body

AKIS-in-Practice! 1.21

AKIS Coordination body in Tuscany Region (Italy)

Keywords/Tags

Governance

AKIS Coordination body

Potential users

Managing authorities of the CAP Strategic Plan

AKIS Cordination bodies

AKIS context

Tuscany hosts a complex and diverse territorial ecosystem, characterized by excellent agriculture rooted in agro-biodiversity and a rich landscape, offering significant positive externalities in tourism and opportunities for production enhancement. Public agro-food research is primarily carried out by universities such as the University of Florence, Pisa, and Siena, with specialized departments and research centers, including the Santa Chiara Lab and the Enrico Avanzi Agro-Environmental Research Center. Additionally, the region benefits from the contributions of the National Research Council (CNR) and CREA, with multiple research centers. Supporting Tuscany's regional development, IRPET that studies the socio-economic and territorial structure of Tuscany, analyzes economic trends, and provides support for regional planning.as well as institutions and universities. Tuscany also hosts notable institutions like the Accademia dei Georgofili, the world's oldest agricultural academy, which promotes research and knowledge dissemination. Furthermore, the region includes agricultural technical institutes and the Ente Terre Regionali Toscane, which plays a key role in agricultural research, experimentation, and conservation. Tuscany is also active in fostering digital innovation through platforms such as the Enterprise 4.0 Regional Platform and the Regional Community of Practice on precision agriculture and digitalization in the agri-food sector. In this context, Local Action Groups (GALs) act as key facilitators in integrating modernization processes, including training, advisory services, and technological innovation. Moreover, the region hosts the Centro delle Competenze della Toscana for the valorization and promotion of traditional agri-food products. Tuscany's engagement extends to interregional and European partnerships, especially through the S3 Agri-food Platform and the ERIAFF (European Region for Innovation in Agriculture, Food and Forestry) Network, aiming to accelerate precision agriculture technologies and enhance European agricultural innovation policies.

For the implementation of the AKIS strategy, Tuscany has decided to activate 8 interventions, with a total funding of € 30.789.310,00.
These interventions include:

- Support for EIP AGRI Operational Groups
- Cooperation for innovation support actions and services for the agricultural, forestry, and agri-food sectors
- Provision of consultancy services
- Knowledge and information exchange for consultants and AKIS actors
- Training actions for professionals in the agricultural, forestry, and rural sectors
- Information actions
- Demonstrative actions for the agricultural, forestry, and rural sectors
- Knowledge and information exchange for consultants and AKIS actors

RATIONALE

The political relevance given to the AKIS strategies in the context of the Strategic Plans (SP) 2023-2027 of the CAP has certainly highlighted the opportunity to define governance bodies aimed at coordinating AKIS-related interventions and actors in order to better implement them and contribute to achieving the cross-cutting and specific objectives of the CAP SPs.
In particular, the AKIS coordination body is identified by the 2023-2027 SP as the contact point for the European Commission and the European CAP Network.
The Managing Authorities of the CAP Strategic Plans have selected the governance set-ups that best align with their management needs and the expectations of relevant stakeholders.
In Italy, as a result of the new delivery model, and differently from previous programming periods, the CAP SP 2023-2027 is established at the national level only. However, since the Regions/Autonomous Provinces have, by Constitution, the competence in agricultural matters, they have set up Rural Development Complementary Programmes (RDCP), which, within the framework of the National CAP SP, have their own governance and implement interventions that are relevant to their specific territories.
The general model of AKIS coordination bodies for Italy is indicated by the CAP SP that mentions a mix of "institutions that have the responsibility/capacity to provide training, advisory services, research, information". Lately, in mid-2024, the Ministry of Agriculture established a national AKIS coordination model which calls for a collective body, composed by representatives of the variety of key AKIS actors.
Under this national framework, the Tuscany Region formally set up its Regional AKIS Coordination Body (AKIS CB), aligning regional implementation with the national model. Tuscany AKIS ensures the integration of advisory, training, research, and innovation services and supports the Region’s commitment to a knowledge-driven, participatory, and digitally connected agricultural system.

IN PRACTICE

The AKIS Regional Coordination Body for the Tuscany RDCP 2023/27 was established by a decree of the regional government (Decreto Dirigenziale n.33/2025) according to Regulation (EU) No. 2021/2115 and consistently with the national model set by the referring Italian ministerial decree (see AKIS-in-Practice 1.13).

1. Who is the AKIS CB

The AKIS Coordination Body of Tuscany was formally established through Regional Decree n. 33/2025 within the framework of the RDCP 2023–2027.

It operates under the authority of the Directorate for Agriculture and Rural Development, and its responsibility lies with the Head of the Sector "Management of Rural Development Measures for Advisory Services, Training, Innovation, Young Farmers, and Diversification of Agricultural Activities."

The AKIS Coordination Body of Tuscany, in line with the National AKIS Coordination, aims to foster the participation of all actors involved in the AKIS — whether direct, indirect, primary, secondary, or tertiary — in the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of AKIS-related instruments.

Through a **multidisciplinary and participatory approach**, the AKIS system is expected to generate added value in the actions implemented, as well as to enhance knowledge dissemination and awareness of its potential.

The benefits of the participatory approach can be observed on multiple levels:

- **Cultural**: building consensus, strengthening social capital, and promoting awareness, education, and a multisectoral perspective.
- **Organizational and managerial**: improving the effectiveness of planning by integrating economic, social, and environmental dimensions and prioritizing resource allocation.
- **Professional**: introducing tools and methods that enhance skills for managing participatory processes.

The operational objectives of the CR-AKIS include:

- Identifying, monitoring, and updating innovation potential and connecting it to the innovation ecosystem (following a Living Lab model).
- Mapping and updating business needs, with a focus on both innovative and more isolated or fragile enterprises.
- Analysing the business environment, including market trends, territorial and community needs, and emerging strategic opportunities.
- Developing methodologies and tools to simplify and innovate AKIS processes — from design to evaluation — ensuring transparency, efficiency, and quality of spending.
- Assessing the multiple impacts of AKIS actions on the socio-economic system.
- Supporting the effective implementation of national and regional strategies for the digitalization of agriculture and rural areas.

.

The AKIS CB of Tuscany is a non-hierarchical, participatory governance body, designed to bring together key institutional, research, advisory, training, and private actors involved in the regional knowledge and innovation system. It provides a forum for consultation, co-design, and continuous improvement of AKIS-related interventions within the RDCP 2023–2027.

2. Composition of the AKIS CB

The AKIS CB of Tuscany is composed of multiple categories of actors, identified through a systematic stakeholder mapping that classifies participants according to their degree of interest, influence, and interdependence within the regional AKIS ecosystem:

- Programming bodies: Regional institutions formally recognised as responsible for policymaking and programme management (top-down governance).
- **Partner organisations**: Entities that collaborate in implementing AKIS activities without being direct beneficiaries, such as research institutions, innovation agencies, or professional associations.
- **Target recipients of the services**: Individuals and organizations, both public and private, who, as a result of the project, experience long-term or indirect improvements in one aspect of their professional condition.
- **Service providers**: Accredited public and private advisory and training bodies delivering services to farmers, foresters, and rural SMEs.

The composition **is periodically reviewed and updated** to reflect the evolution of the system and to maintain balance between public, private, and civil society representation.

A **core operational structure** supports the functioning of the AKIS CB of Tuscany It includes:

- AKIS CB of Tuscany **Responsible**, who defines programming, ensures coordination with the National AKIS CB, and manages communication with regional, national, and EU partners.
- The **Director – Managing Authority – managers responsible for programming,** which supports strategy alignment, measurement, and evaluation.
- The Head of the Tenuta di Cesa Management, Innovation and European Projects Unit, Terre Regionali Toscane(who ensures the link between research, field experimentation, and dissemination.
- **Intervention Managers and Operational Staff** (AKIS Team), responsible for data collection, reporting, and organising meetings.
- **Digitalisation Officers**, from the Directorate for Technological Infrastructure and Innovation, ensuring the digital transformation of the system through the design of a **front-end platform** that enables data sharing and networking.

Additionally, one or more **facilitators or institutional experts** may be designated to support participatory processes during committee sessions, ensuring methodological coherence and stakeholder engagement.



3. Functions attributed to the AKIS CB

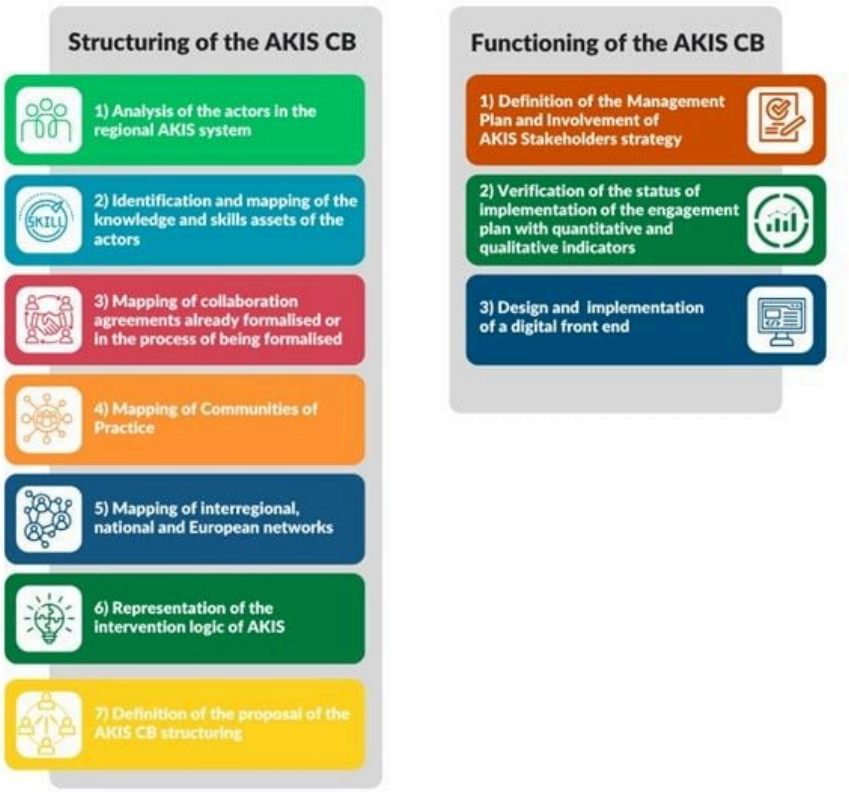
The functioning of the AKIS CB of Tuscany is supported by an operational structure, which includes the Manager of the AKIS CB and other listed stakeholders.

Table 1: Roles and functions of the AKIS CB of Tuscany operational structure

Role	Functions
Manager of the AKIS CB of Tuscany region - Head of the RDCP Intervention Management Sector for advisory services, training, innovation, young farmers and the diversification of agricultural activities	• Defines and implements AKIS interventions • Manages communications with MASAF regarding AKIS. • Interfaces with regional, national, and EU institutions to promote AKIS. • Coordinates with other Tuscany Region departments to identify cooperation and integration opportunities, mainly with European Social Fund (ESF) and European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) • Ensures the ongoing maintenance of AKIS CB of Tuscany. • Outlines the stakeholder engagement strategy and reviews it based on the measurement plan. • Defines the AKIS CB of Tuscany Engagement Plan. • Coordinates AKIS CB of Tuscany activities. • Directs AKIS CB of Tuscany and operational structure activities. • Collects and defines key directions from AKIS CB of Tuscany. • Works with AKIS staff to organize AKIS CB of Tuscany activities. • Develops a measurement plan for resources, products, and results to evaluate AKIS strategy impact.
Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (Director, MA and Intervention Planning Managers)	• Collaborate with the AKIS CB of Tuscany Manager to ensure knowledge sharing, innovation, and digitalization promotion in agriculture and rural areas. • Support the AKIS CB of Tuscany Manager in structuring the measurement and evaluation plan for implementation, including through their own delegates.
Head of Management Sector Tenuta di Cesa, innovation and European projects, Terre Regionali Toscane	• Supports the AKIS CB of Tuscany Manager in analyzing applied research, experimentation, and field demonstrations in agriculture and forestry, aimed at disseminating innovations across the region.
Operational contacts for the functioning of the RCDP Interventions Management Sector for advisory services, training, innovation, young farmers and the diversification of agricultural activities - AKIS staff	• Provides operational support for organizing and managing AKIS CB of Tuscany activities. • Collaborates with the AKIS CB of Tuscany Manager and operational coordinators on programming and communication with AKIS CB of Tuscany members. • Prepares meeting reports and other functional reports, collecting results from AKIS CB of Tuscany activities. • Manages the operational organization of meetings.
Contact persons for digitisation Information Systems Department Technological Infrastructure and Innovation IT services and systems supporting the planning, monitoring and control of procedures relating to agriculture, forestry and rural development	• Supports the digital evolution of administration, coordinating the development of digital public services and transparent communication models with stakeholders and citizens. • Promotes the diffusion of knowledge and digital technologies.

The structure and functioning of AKIS CB of Tuscany involves a process outlined in several actions and activities for the structuring of the AKIS CB and its functioning (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Actions for the structuring and functioning of the AKIS CB of Tuscany



Source: Elaborations on Annex A – Decree n. 33/2025

4.Procedures for interplaying with other AKIS actors and with the MA of the CAP SP

To facilitate the exchange of experiences, activities, and information among AKIS CB of Tuscany members and externally, a digital front-end will be implemented. The digital front-ends will serve as a bridge between different actors, particularly the advisory services providers, local farms, and scientific and technological research institutions, promoting real-time data and information exchange. This platform aims to:

1. Support participation through a tool that facilitates knowledge of the AKIS system, including a digital mapping of its members.
2. Support the collection and dissemination of AKIS-related documentation, playing an important role in information sharing.
3. Assist in the activities of the AKIS CB.
4. Monitor and identify solutions aligned with the needs of Tuscan farms.
5. Track and address the demand and supply of innovation by engaging networks.
6. Foster collaborative processes and stable co-generation.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR REPLICABILITY

The set-up of an AKIS coordination body like this requires:

- **Formal establishment through an official act**: The AKIS Coordination Body is constituted through a formal legal act, ensuring institutional legitimacy and long-term stability.
- **Creation of a clearly defined operational team**: A dedicated team—including managers, facilitators, digital officers, and innovation experts—is established to support the effective functioning of the regional AKIS CB.
- **Development of a stakeholder engagement and management plan**: A structured plan is designed to ensure the active involvement of all relevant AKIS actors, promoting inclusive governance and co-design processes.
- **Acquisition of skills for participatory methodologies**: Skills in participatory approaches are developed either internally or through external expertise, enhancing the quality of stakeholder engagement and decision-making.
- **Allocation of an adequate budget for the digital front-end**: A sufficient budget is foreseen to support the development and implementation of the digital front-end platform, enabling data sharing, transparency, and collaboration among AKIS actors.

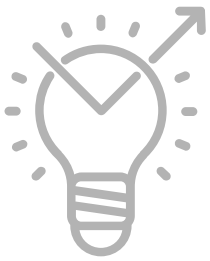
BENEFITS

- **Inclusive and Multi-Actor Governance Model:** The AKIS CB adopts a non-hierarchical, participatory governance structure grounded in systematic stakeholder mapping. This model is designed to promote inclusive decision-making, foster collaboration among diverse AKIS actors, and enable the co-design of interventions that are responsive to regional needs and priorities.
- **Dynamic and Adaptive Composition:** The periodic review of the CB's composition ensures responsiveness to evolving needs and maintains balanced representation. This adaptability is essential for replicability in diverse regional contexts.
- **Continuous Monitoring and Evaluation:** The use of measurement plans and feedback mechanisms ensures that AKIS strategies are continuously improved based on evidence and stakeholder input.

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

• Rural Development Complementary Programme of Tuscany Region (IT).

Italy



Department of Agriculture and Rural Development – Tuscany Region:
Fausta Fabbri
fausta.fabbri@regione.toscana.it

modernAKIS Together for Systems' Innovation

AKIS Coordination Body

AKIS-in-Practice! 1.22

AKIS Coordination body in Sicilian Region (Italy)

Keywords/Tags

Governance

AKIS Coordination body

Potential users

Managing authorities of the CAP Strategic Plan

AKIS Cordination bodies

AKIS context

The AKIS strategy of the Sicilian Region is designed to strengthen the integration, coordination, and effectiveness of the regional system of knowledge and innovation in agriculture. In line with the objectives of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) — promoting a smart and resilient agricultural sector, safeguarding the environment and climate, and fostering rural employment and development — Sicily's AKIS approach aims to move beyond traditional top-down knowledge transfer models towards a more participatory and systemic framework. This vision acknowledges the complexity and richness of local contexts, the centrality of human and social capital, and the need for stronger collaboration among research, advisory, training, and entrepreneurial actors.

Historically, Sicily has a strong institutional foundation for agricultural knowledge systems, rooted in Regional Law No. 73 of 1 August 1977, which established a structured network for technical assistance and promotional activities involving regional agencies, universities, and research institutes. Building on this tradition, the current AKIS strategy promotes the creation of mixed systems of research, innovation, advisory services, and rural animation to enhance both farm performance and territorial development.

Within the 2023–2027 programming period, Sicily has decided to activate eight AKIS-related interventions aimed at improving the circulation of knowledge, innovation uptake, and cooperation among actors. These include support for Operational Groups under the EIP-AGRI framework, pilot and cooperation projects for innovation, as well as measures dedicated to advisory services, training and knowledge exchange, information activities, and demonstration actions for agricultural, forestry, and rural stakeholders. Altogether, these interventions represent a public investment of approximately €21.6 million, reinforcing the Region's commitment to building a more connected, innovative, and sustainable AKIS ecosystem.

RATIONALE

The political relevance given to the AKIS strategies in the context of the Strategic Plans (SP) 2023-2027 of the CAP has certainly highlighted the opportunity to define governance bodies aimed at coordinating AKIS-related interventions and actors in order to better implement them and contribute to achieving the cross-cutting and specific objectives of the CAP SPs.
In particular, the AKIS coordination body is identified by the 2023-2027 SP as the contact point for the European Commission and the European CAP Network.
The Managing Authorities of the CAP Strategic Plans have selected the governance set-ups that best align with their management needs and the expectations of relevant stakeholders.
In Italy, as a result of the new delivery model, and differently from previous programming periods, the CAP SP 2023-2027 is established at the national level only. However, since the Regions/Autonomous Provinces have, by Constitution, the competence in agricultural matters, they have set up Rural Development Complementary Programmes (RDCP), which, within the framework of the National CAP SP, have their own governance and implement interventions that are relevant to their specific territories.
The general model of AKIS coordination bodies for Italy is indicated by the CAP SP that mentions a mix of "institutions that have the responsibility/capacity to provide training, advisory services, research, information". Lately, in mid-2024, the Ministry of Agriculture established a national AKIS coordination model which calls for a collective body, composed by representatives of the variety of key AKIS actors.
Under this national framework, the Sicily Region has established in 2025 a Regional AKIS Coordination Body for the RDCP 2023-2027.

IN PRACTICE

The AKIS Regional Coordination Body for the Sicily RDCP 2023/27 was established by a Decree of the Regional Minister for Agriculture (Decree N. 65 Gab) according to Regulation (EU) No. 2021/2115 and consistently with the national model set by the referring Italian ministerial decree (see AKIS-in-Practice 1.13).

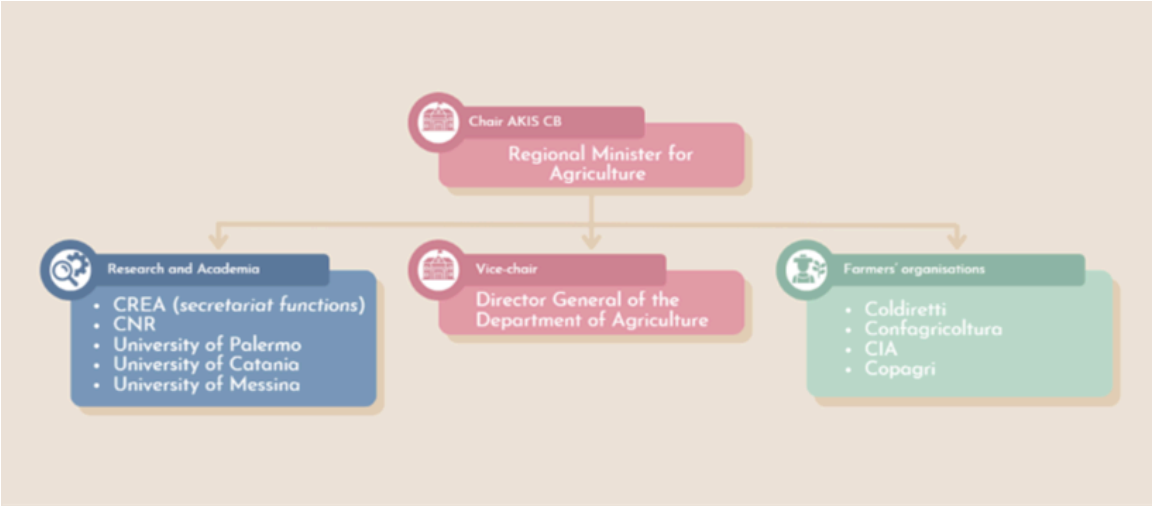
1. Who is the AKIS CB

The Regional AKIS Coordination Body of Sicily is a collegial body established within the Regional Department of Agriculture, under the Ministry for Agriculture, Rural Development and Mediterranean Fisheries. It ensures the coordination, consultation, and strategic alignment of all regional policies related to agricultural knowledge and innovation.

2. Composition of the AKIS CB

The body is chaired by the Regional Minister for Agriculture and includes the Director General of the Department of Agriculture as Vice-Chair, representatives from the main Sicilian universities (Palermo, Catania, and Messina), national research institutions (CNR and CREA), and the principal regional farmers' organisations (Coldiretti, Confagricoltura, CIA, and Copagri). CREA also performs the secretariat function.

Figure 1: Composition of the Regional AKIS Coordination Body of Emilia-Romagna Region



Source: Authors' elaborations based on Decree of the Regional Minister for Agriculture of Sicilian Region (Decree N. 65 Gab).

3. Functions attributed to the AKIS CB

Its main functions are to:

- Support the definition and implementation of policies for innovation and knowledge in the agricultural, agri-food and forestry sectors within the regional territory.
- Promote dialogue and connections among the different AKIS actors and institutions at territorial level.
- Facilitate the sharing of available innovations and the flow of information between the various regional organisational levels.
- Identify needs, priorities, and implementation challenges related to AKIS interventions and the regional digitalisation strategy.
- Carry out continuous monitoring of the needs of agricultural and forestry enterprises.
- Examine and facilitate the application of proposals coming from the National AKIS Coordination Body.
- Promote the exchange of approaches, experiences, and results of regional AKIS initiatives at all territorial levels, including participation in European networks such as Horizon Europe and the EIP-AGRI network.

The Coordination Body also prepares specific technical or strategic documents — such as opinions, needs assessments, and proposals — addressing the priority areas of AKIS interventions and the digitalisation strategy, the connection among interventions, urgent or emerging issues, and the coordination of AKIS-related activities with other European, national, or regional financial instruments.

4. Procedures for interplaying with other AKIS actors and with the MA of the CAP SP

Through its periodic meetings and shared deliberations, the Coordination Body of Sicilian Region acts as a permanent platform for interplay and coordination between institutions, research, advisory services, and professional organisations. This collegial structure ensures that Sicily's AKIS governance operates in an integrated, participatory, and coherent manner, strengthening the regional innovation ecosystem and its connection with national and EU frameworks.



PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR REPLICABILITY

The set-up of an AKIS coordination body like this requires:

- A formal act of constitution.
- The definition of a general legal framework that is recognised by all members of the AKIS coordination body.

BENEFITS

- Representativeness of the main local key AKS actors.
- Improved dialogue and collaboration between institutions, research organisations, advisory services, and farmers' associations.
- Enhanced capacity to identify and address emerging needs, priorities, and challenges in a timely and integrated manner.

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- Rural Development Complementary Programmes – Sicilian Region (IT).
- Decree N65/GAB (IT).

Italy

Department for Agriculture, Rural Development and Mediterranean Fisheries - Sicilian Region:
Dott. Antonino Drago
agri.innovazione@regione.sicilia.itt

modernAKIS Together for Systems' Innovation

AKIS Coordination Body

AKIS-in-Practice! 1.23

AKIS Coordination body in Emilia-Romagna Region (Italy)

Keywords/Tags

Governance

AKIS Coordination body

Potential users

Managing authorities of the CAP Strategic Plan

AKIS Cordination bodies

AKIS context

The AKIS of Emilia-Romagna is characterised by a highly articulated and dynamic system of actors operating across research, advisory, training, and technological innovation. Mapping its exact composition is complex, due to institutional reforms and the natural interplay between entities belonging to different governance levels. Four main areas define the regional AKIS.

The first area concerns **research and experimentation.** Alongside the institutions traditionally responsible for research activities — the universities, CNR, and CREA — the Region also relies on the High Technology Network, a unique system in Italy that brings together accredited public and private research laboratories and innovation centres. In the agri-food domain alone, twelve such structures are active across the regional territory.

The second area covers **advisory and technical assistance services,** which support farms in implementing productive, economic, and social improvements. These involve a wide range of organisations, including farmers' associations, cooperatives, producer groups, professional studios, and input suppliers.
The third area relates to **education and vocational training**, which remain key priorities given the ageing farm population and the relatively low level of formal education. Nevertheless, the region shows strong specialisation in tertiary agricultural education, accounting for over 16% of Italy's total graduates in this field.
The fourth area is represented by **advanced and digital technologies**, where Emilia-Romagna performs above the national average in the use of electronic devices and web-based solutions in agriculture. Farmers are increasingly adopting precision farming and sustainable production technologies, although further advisory support is needed to widen knowledge dissemination.
The agri-food sector represented a significant share of both the overall investment in projects and the majority of trained participants. Thanks to targeted training and knowledge-exchange initiatives, a large number of individuals benefited from crucial learning opportunities. Furthermore, through dedicated advisory services, farmers accessed specialized support, particularly on advanced topics such as precision agriculture and quality production. The region also fostered strong collaboration between research and practice through 232 Operational Groups and 80 pilot supply chain projects, characterised by diverse partnerships and high coherence between consortium composition and thematic focus. While challenges remain — notably in engaging smaller farms and supporting generational renewal — Emilia-Romagna's AKIS demonstrates a robust and well-connected ecosystem capable of channeling innovation and knowledge towards sustainable competitiveness and rural development.
In the 2023–2027 programming period, Emilia-Romagna has planned eight AKIS interventions, with a total allocation of **€51 million** from the regional CAP resources.

RATIONALE

The political relevance given to the AKIS strategies in the context of the Strategic Plans (SP) 2023-2027 of the CAP has certainly highlighted the opportunity to define governance bodies aimed at coordinating AKIS-related interventions and actors in order to better implement them and contribute to achieving the cross-cutting and specific objectives of the CAP SPs.
In particular, the AKIS coordination body is identified by the 2023-2027 SP as the contact point for the European Commission and the European CAP Network.
The Managing Authorities of the CAP Strategic Plans have selected the governance set-ups that best align with their management needs and the expectations of relevant stakeholders.
In Italy, as a result of the new delivery model, and differently from previous programming periods, the CAP SP 2023-2027 is established at the national level only. However, since the Regions/Autonomous Provinces have, by Constitution, the competence in agricultural matters, they have set up Rural Development Complementary Programmes (RDCP), which, within the framework of the National CAP SP, have their own governance and implement interventions that are relevant to their specific territories.
The general model of AKIS coordination bodies for Italy is indicated by the CAP SP that mentions a mix of "institutions that have the responsibility/capacity to provide training, advisory services, research, information". Lately, in mid-2024, the Ministry of Agriculture established a national AKIS coordination model which calls for a collective body, composed by representatives of the variety of key AKIS actors.
Under this national framework, the Emilia-Romagna Region has established a Regional AKIS Coordination Body for the RDCP 2023-2027.

IN PRACTICE

The Regional AKIS Coordination Body for the Emilia-Romagna CAP Strategic Plan 2023–2027 was established by a resolution of the Regional Government (Regional Resolution No. 589 of 22 April 2025) according to Regulation (EU) No. 2021/2115 and consistently with the national model set by the referring Italian ministerial decree (see AKIS-in-Practice 1.13).

1. Who is the AKIS CB

In Emilia-Romagna, the AKIS Coordination Body is a collegial body composed of 39 representatives from regional institutions, research and academic organisations, farmers' associations, advisory and training bodies, professional orders, interprofessional organisations, and civil society.

2. Composition of the AKIS CB

The composition of the AKIS Coordination body of Emilia-Romagna Region includes 39 representatives from the following categories:

Figure 1: Composition of the Regional AKIS Coordination Body of Emilia-Romagna Region

Source: Authors' elaborations based on Regional Resolution No. 589 of 22 April 2025.

The detailed composition of the AKIS Coordination Body for the Emilia-Romagna Region is provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Composition of the AKIS Coordination Body of Emilia-Romagna Region

Category	Organisation / Institution
Public Authorities	Regional Minister for Agriculture, Agri-food, Hunting and Fisheries, and Relations with the EU
	Directorate-General for Agriculture, Hunting and Fisheries
	Managing Authority of the CAP Strategic Plan
	AGREA – Regional Paying Agency
	ARPAE – Regional Agency for Environment, Prevention and Energy
Regional Agricultural Council (Art. 4, Regional Law No. 15/2021)	CIA Agricoltori Italiani Emilia-Romagna
	Coldiretti Emilia-Romagna
	Confagricoltura Emilia-Romagna
	Copagri Emilia-Romagna
	Terra Viva
	Confcooperative Emilia-Romagna
	AGCI Emilia-Romagna
	Legacoop Emilia-Romagna
	UECOOP
	FAI-CISL
	FLAI-CGIL
	UILA-UIL
Research, Academic and Innovation Institutions	Catholic University of the Sacred Heart – Piacenza Campus
	University of Bologna
	University of Ferrara
	University of Modena and Reggio Emilia
	University of Parma
	CNR – National Research Council of Italy
	CREA – Council for Agricultural Research and Economics
	ISPRA – Institute for Environmental Protection and Research
	JRC – Joint Research Centre (European Commission)
	CRPA S.p.A. – Research Centre for Animal Production
	SSICA – Experimental Station for the Food Preserving Industry
	SITEIA Parma – Interdepartmental Centre for Food Safety, Technologies and Innovation
	CIDEA – Interdepartmental Centre for Energy and Environmental Research
	Terra & Acqua Tech
	Proambiente S.c.r.l.
	Rinova Soc. Coop.
Advisory, Training and Knowledge Transfer Bodies	CENTOFORM S.r.l.
	DINAMICA S.c.a r.l.
	IRECOOP Soc. Coop.
	Fondazione ITS Academy Tech & Food
Professional Orders and Associations	CUP – Committee of Professional Associations of Emilia-Romagna
	Regional Federation of Agronomists and Foresters
	Regional Federation of Agrotechnicians and Agrotechnical Graduates
	Order of Agricultural Experts and Graduated Experts
	Regional Federation of Veterinary Orders
Interprofessional and Sectoral Organisations	Interprofessional Organisation "Pomodoro da Industria Nord Italia"
	Interprofessional Organisation "Gran Suino Italiano"
	Interprofessional Organisation "Pera"
	FederBio – Federation of Organic and Biodynamic Agriculture
Consumers and Civil Society Organisations	ANCC–ACCDA – National Association of Consumer Cooperatives
	Consumers' Associations (collectively represented)
	Federforeste

Source: Regional Resolution No. 589 of 22 April 2025.

Moreover, to address specific supply chains, territorial areas, or innovation domains, the Coordination Body may establish thematic sub-groups, thereby promoting horizontal collaboration and integration across the regional AKIS. In addition to these sub-groups, the Coordination Body may also invite external experts or stakeholders with specific competences and experience relevant to the AKIS activities, whenever their contribution is deemed functional to specific needs or topics under discussion.

3. Functions attributed to the AKIS CB

The **Regional AKIS Coordination Body of Emilia-Romagna** is responsible for coordinating the design and implementation of policies on innovation and knowledge in the agricultural, agri-food, and forestry sectors.
Its main **functions** are to:

- Support the definition and implementation of policies for innovation and knowledge in the agricultural, agri-food, and forestry sectors within the regional territory.
- Promote dialogue and connections among the various AKIS actors at territorial level.
- Facilitate the sharing of available innovations and the flow of information across regional and subregional organisational levels.
- Identify needs, priorities, and challenges related to the implementation of AKIS interventions and the regional digitalisation strategy.
- Carry out continuous monitoring of the needs of agricultural and forestry enterprises.
- Examine and facilitate the application of proposals coming from the National AKIS Coordination (CN-AKIS).
- Promote the exchange of approaches, experiences, and results of regional AKIS initiatives at all territorial levels, including participation in European networks such as Horizon Europe and EIP-AGRI.

Through these activities, the Coordination Body ensures greater integration, coherence, and knowledge circulation within the regional AKIS governance system.

4. Procedures for interplaying with other AKIS actors and with the MA of the CAP SP

The Regional AKIS Coordination Body of Emilia-Romagna acts as a governance structure ensuring continuous coordination and exchange among regional, national, and European actors involved in agricultural knowledge and innovation. It interfaces with the Managing Authority of the CAP Strategic Plan, the National AKIS Coordination (CN-AKIS), the National CAP Network, and the Interregional Research Network for Agriculture, Forestry, Aquaculture and Fisheries. The Body also maintains structured relations with other EU and national funds (including EAFRD, ERDF, ESF+, and FSC) to guarantee coherence and complementarity across innovation and rural development initiatives.
A Technical Secretariat, established within the Directorate-General for Agriculture, Hunting and Fisheries – Innovation, Training and Advisory Services Unit – provides operational support, coordinates information flows, and ensures the follow-up of decisions.
During its **first meeting,** the Coordination Body will formally adopt its **rules of procedure**, defining operational modalities, frequency of meetings, and internal decision-making processes.



PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR REPLICABILITY

The set-up of an AKIS coordination body like this requires

- A formal act of constitution.
- The definition of a general legal framework that is recognised by all members of the AKIS coordination body
- A separation of competences, a clear definition of responsibilities and mutual recognition of respective functions (e.g., provision of technical assistance/advisory services, research, innovation support services, administrative controls, monitoring and evaluation, ...) by the members of the AKIS coordination body.
- The establishment of internal procedures for coordination meetings and co-decision on action plans to implement the AKIS strategy (internal regulations).

BENEFITS

- Wide representativeness of local key AKS actors.
- Capacity to identify the needs of various AKIS stakeholders, facilitated by the establishment of Thematic Groups.
- The flexibility of the Thematic Groups provides an additional benefit by allowing for a more tailored and responsive approach to addressing emerging challenges.

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- Rural Development Complementary Programmes – Emilia-Romagna Region (IT).
- Resolution No. 589 of 22 April 2025 (IT).

Italy

Department of Agriculture, Agri-food, Hunting and Fisheries – Emilia-Romagna Region:
Patrizia Alberti
Patrizia.Alberti@regione.emilia-romagna.it
Maria Costanza Balboni
MariaCostanza.Balboni@regione.emilia-romagna.it

modernAKIS Together for Systems' Innovation

Theme 3

Training, knowledge exchange and information

Keywords/Tags

- Training
- Advisors
- Integration
- Knowledge exchange

RATIONALE

What competences for advisors?

Strengthening competencies is one of the two main paths to strengthen the agricultural advisory services within the AKIS.

Art. 15 Reg. (EC) 2021/2115 states that "Member States shall include in their CAP Strategic Plans a system providing services for advising farmers and other beneficiaries of CAP support on land management and farm management ('farm advisory services'). Member States may build upon existing systems. The farm advisory services shall cover economic, environmental and social dimensions, taking into account existing farming practices, and deliver up-to-date technological and scientific information developed by means of research and innovation projects, including as regards the provision of public goods…".

The aim of this provision is to support farm decision-making through a holistic approach, integrating the various sources of information and the farm context. The advisor should be able to consider all aspects of agriculture, from the overall effect on farm profitability to changing parts of production to specific technical advice. In short, the aim is to promote prompt, tailor-made, trusted advice.

To this aim, Member States must ensure adequate training and the integration of all advisors, public and private.
Since the challenges are becoming more and more complex, advisors should be ready for change. Linear advice (based on technical knowledge transfer) will always continue to play a role, but the future advisor should be more listening-oriented, able to act as an intermediary and to support the farmer by adapting information to the specific farm circumstances and farmer's needs. Moreover, more and more competences are needed to support multi-actor innovation processes.
Acquiring soft skills, including cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) or practical (involving the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments) ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve complex problems, asks for new training approaches based on experiential and transformative learning and interactive methods.
In this respect, the SWG SCAR-AKIS Policy Brief on New approaches on Agricultural Education Systems recommend focusing on multi-actor approaches (e.g., masterclasses that could be developed by researchers, teachers/education and advisors together with agricultural entrepreneurs) and peer to peer learning initiatives (e.g., study groups).
Six different training practices are presented in this section: demonstration projects and demonstration actions, international study visit and cross visit, the Mötesplats AKIS meeting and the Copernicus Academy.

THE STRATEGIC FUNCTION TRAINING

Article 15 goes on to state that "...Farm advisory services shall be integrated within the interrelated services of farm advisors, researchers, farmer organisations and other relevant stakeholders that form the AKIS. Member States shall ensure that the advice given is impartial and that advisors are suitably qualified, appropriately trained and have no conflict of interest.
The farm advisory services shall be adapted to the various types of production and farms". Education programmes for advisors are generally defined by advisors, education centres (e.g., universities), and public institutions responsible for policies/programmes, resulting in different objectives and achievements.
To better connect advisors into the AKIS, there is the need of aligning advisors' 'skills and messages they deliver to farmers to policies objectives, programmes and strategies focusing on agricultural and rural development.
Advisory services should cover the needs of a variety of farmers, both small and large scale, as well as have a deeper understanding of agroecological & organic practices and production techniques and how these can be applied in the different farming systems.
This is the main reason why advisors' training should be publicly funded.
Moreover, in many cases, specific advisory competences are missing (e.g., new techniques, new crops, minor sectors, drones, etc.) and this undermines farmers' trust.
Therefore, it is important to keep impartial advisors up with the latest knowledge in order to be on an equal footing with staff from private firms which is paid for commercial goals.
In addition, public authorities have a responsibility to push the knowledge frontier even further, communicating research results in a format so that the advisors can incorporate the new knowledge in their advice. Since agricultural higher education is more and more going away from practical applications and
getting oriented to the most "publishable" research results, the need for a more holistic approach offered by advisory services becomes more urgent.

FIRST INSIGHTS FROM PRACTICES

The practice presented in this "Compendium" showcases some interesting and replicable approaches: the first two describe how Demonstration projects and Demonstration actions are going to be implemented under the CAP SP 2023-2027, respectively in the Netherlands and in Latvia.
The third case illustrates how international study visits were used by Sweden to learn from neighboring countries how they have successfully integrated research and advisory services. Similarly, a cross visit was organized by the Veneto Region, as a part of a broader training program titled "I am an AKIS Actor! Toward New Horizons in Agricultural Advisory 2023-2027: Scenes Inside and Out," to engage directly with on-the-ground examples of innovative practices and solutions applied in Flanders and, in this way, learn how other countries deal with AKIS interventions.
The Mötesplats AKIS meeting shows a practical example on how to provide a "safety space" to different actors (advisors, researchers, people working with policy makers, public servants and governmental bodies, universities and people from other organizations that work on agricultural development) to share knowledge and experiences along with networking.
Finally, the Copernicus Academy illustrates a training project aimed at providing sensibilization and awareness among advisors on the use of digital tools for supporting more sustainable practices in farming systems, along with training on the possible joint use of agronomic knowledge with earth observation and georeferencing information on land.

FOOD FOR THINKING

Advisor training is much more than a regulatory requirement. Training is an opportunity to continuously improve individuals' competencies, giving them the chance to explore topics of public interest and discover new things that open up new horizons. It also keeps professionals up to date with the rapidly changing environment and profession, providing them with the necessary competencies. All this results in a guarantee for farmers and foresters: a curious advisor, who does not stop updating, will continue to offer a quality service, thus gaining the trust of his/her clients.
In this perspective, we could raise a few questions (not exhaustive) to help us reflect on training implementation:

- How to define training of trainers? How to find trainers? How to ensure training replication on the territory by the trained advisors?
- How to define an effective training plan?
- How to define curricula for advisors that take into account the latest results of research and innovation projects?
- How to facilitate the acquisition of the soft and cross-cutting skills? by which methods?
- How to remove barriers, typical of certain institutional cultures within policy making and administrators that "cage" training within traditional frameworks that hardly contemplate experiential methods and the opportunity to travel?

HOW TO FOLLOW-UP WITH THE RESULTS OF COLLECTION OF AKIS-IN-PRACTICE!

- CoPs' workshop aimed at defining a training plan. The workshop could be attended, for instance, by trainers from the i2connect and ATTRACTISS projects (concerning soft skills) and trainers from projects that are working on technical aspects related to sustainability (e.g., Climate Smart Advisors).
- Agreements for the implementation of training modules developed by European projects within the framework of CAP-supported interventions: the Member State provides the course and the trainers are paid by the project.

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 of the European Parliament and of the Council, art. 15 and art. 78
- EU SCAR AKIS (2019), Preparing for Future AKIS in Europe. Brussels, European Commission.
- SWG SCAR-AKIS Policy Brief on New approaches on Agricultural Education Systems https://scar-europe.org/akis-documents

modernAKIS Together for Systems' Innovation

Training, knowledge exchange and information

Get-inspired4AKIS!3.12

Demonstration Farms in Czech Republic: A Practical Approach to strengthen the system of knowledge transfer in agriculture and related fields

Keywords/Tags

- Demo-farms
- Peer-to-peer learning

Potential users

- AKIS coordination bodies
- Advisors and trainers
- Farmers and other agricultural workers
- Policy makers and Managing Authorities

RATIONALE

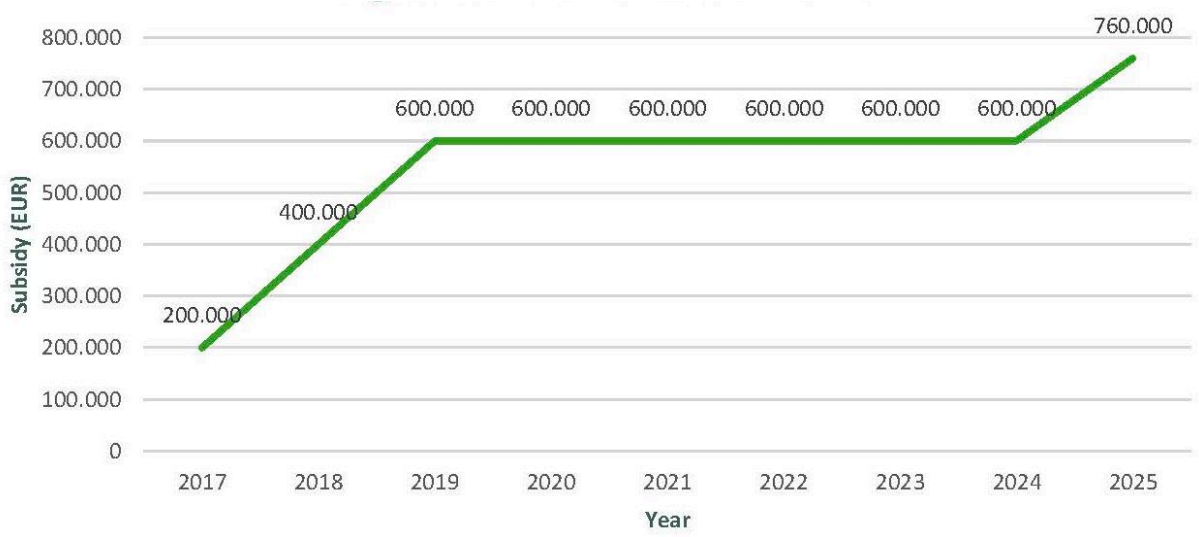
Within the AKIS strategy of the Czech Republic, a key priority has been to strengthen knowledge transfer and improve cooperation between farmers, advisors, researchers, and other actors. Analyses of the system highlighted several weaknesses: advisory services often did not cover critical topics for sustainable agriculture, training was too general and insufficiently targeted, and independent advisors lacked the capacity to meet sectoral needs. At the same time, cooperation between research and practice remained limited, as reflected by low number of EIP groups and weak uptake of innovations by enterprises. The fragmented structure of AKIS and limited networking among its actors further reduced its effectiveness.

In response to these gaps, the Ministry of Agriculture launched the establishment of demonstration farm groups. Their role is to provide farmers with hands-on, on-farm exposure to sustainable practices and to serve as a practical platform for knowledge exchange across AKIS actors. This approach enables farmers to learn directly from practical, on-farm demonstrations rather than relying solely on theoretical knowledge. By addressing the shortcomings of traditional advisory and training systems, demonstration farms serve as a concrete tool of the Czech AKIS strategy to improve the adoption of good practices on arable lands, and strengthen the integration of innovation into agriculture, and animal production.

SOLUTION

In Czech Republic, a national network of demonstration farms was established supported by a national subsidy programme (Agricultural Advisory Support Programme 9.F.m – Demonstration Farms). Launched in 2017 with an initial pilot test on three farms in 2016, the programme has since expanded, with funding allocations gradually increasing over time (Figure. 1). Between 2017 and 2026, the number of demonstration farms grew from 7 to 22. In 2024, 20 approved farms organized around 550 events, attracting more than 3,300 participants, including nearly 2,000 farmers.

Figure 1. Funding trends of the Agricultural Advisory Support Programme – Demonstration Farms



Source: Author elaboration on EU CAP Network (2025) Projects presented during the EU CAP Network seminar 'On-farm demonstrations for peer-to-peer learning and innovation'.

Currently, each demonstration farm is eligible for subsidies of up to EUR 40,000 per year, depending on the range of activities undertaken. These activities include preparing demo fields, hosting open days, providing individual or group consultations, cooperating with research, and carrying out promotional work.

IN PRACTICE

The Ministry of Agriculture supports demonstration farms through a structured subsidy programme that operates on a three-year project cycle. Farms interested in joining the programme must apply through the project cycle, and once approved, farms annually submit a plan outlining specific demonstration activities for a given year. Depending on the activities carried out, approved demonstration farms can receive a subsidy of up to EUR 40,000 per year.

The eligible activities include:

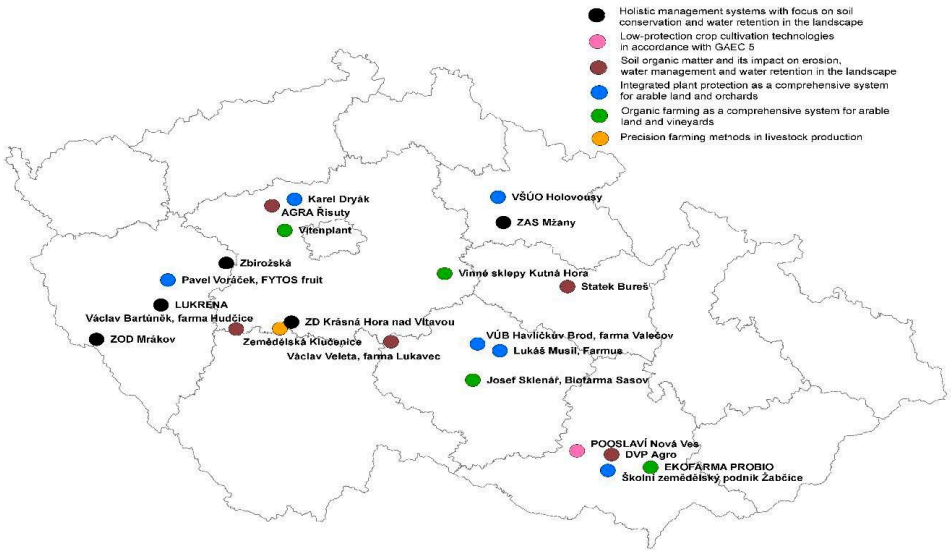
- preparing demonstration fields,
- organizing open days for the public (a minimum of 10 agricultural enterprises are required to participate),
- offering individual or group consultation,
- cooperating with research institutions,
- undertaking promotional work to share results.

Each farm selects which activities to implement, giving flexibility while maintaining focus on knowledge transfer.

Demonstration events are practical and field-based, designed to show sustainable techniques under real farm conditions. Key themes focused by on-farm demonstrations include soil conservation and water retention, low-input crop cultivation, improving soil organic matter to reduce erosion, integrated plant protection, organic farming, and precision livestock management.

To ensure that the practice is demonstrated in different production contexts, diverse farms – including small family farms, large farms, mixed farms, and those specializing in orchards or vineyards – are allowed to participate in on-farm demonstrations. At present, 22 farms are part of the practice, although their distribution remains uneven across the country (Figure 2.).

Figure 2. Distribution of demo farms across Czech Republic



Source: EU CAP Network (2025) Projects presented during the EU CAP Network seminar 'On-farm demonstrations for peer-to-peer learning and innovation'.

Concluding, by actively involving farms in planning and implementation, structured funding, flexibility in activity design, regular planning and reporting, and a clear focus on practical demonstrations of sustainable farming practices, the programme builds ownership and motivation while providing a tested framework that can be replicated in other regions.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR REPLICABILITY

To replicate this practice, end users should consider several practical aspects:

- Administrative framework: Requires a legal/policy basis (e.g. Agricultural Advisory Support Programme 9.F.m in the Czech Republic) to ensure stable funding and legitimacy.
- Organizational set-up: Farms apply within a three-year project framework and submit annual activity plans, ensuring accountability, regular monitoring, and flexibility.
- Funding: Subsidies/budgets should cover demo fields, events, consultations, research cooperation, and promotion, with room for gradual increases.
- Farm diversity and distribution: Involving different farm sizes and production systems ensures wider relevance; attention to geographic coverage, and networking.

BENEFITS

- Strengthens knowledge exchange within the AKIS through practical, farm-based demonstrations.
- Provides hands-on learning opportunities that are more accessible and effective than purely theoretical training.
- Ensures direct and active involvement of farmers, as they design their own projects and activities. Coupled with farmer voluntary participation, the practice builds ownership and motivation among farmers.
- Offers flexibility, since the subsidy can be tailored across different activity types (demo fields, events, consultations, research cooperation, promotion).
- By subsidizing a wide range of activities, the practice relaxes farmer financial constraint associated with applying acquired hands-on knowledge on sustainable practices.
- By covering a wide range of sustainable farming themes, the practice allows farmers to:
    1. Improve resilience and productivity by adopting practices that enhance soil health, conserve water, and reduce erosion.
    2. Lower input costs through low-input crop technologies and precision livestock management.
    3. Meet market and policy demands by integrating organic farming and environmentally friendly practices.
    4. Adapt solutions to different farm types and contexts, since the themes are relevant across arable, mixed, orchard, vineyard, and livestock systems.
    5. Strengthen long-term sustainability of farming by balancing productivity with environmental protection.
- By involving diverse farm types, the practice makes demonstrations relevant to different production contexts.



FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/events/eu-cap-network-seminar-farm-demonstrations-peer-peer-learning-innovation_en.
- https://agronavigator.cz/demo-objekty/demonstracni-farmy.
- https://mze.gov.cz/public/portal/mze/puda/demonstracni-farmy.
- https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/cap-my-country/cap-strategic-plans/czechia_en?prefLang=it.
- https://agridata.ec.europa.eu/extensions/DashboardCapPlan/catalogue_interventions.html.

Czech Republic

Institute of Agricultural Economics and Information
Andrea Hrabalová
hrabalova.andrea@uzei.cz

Watch this AKIS-in-Practice!

modernAKIS Together for Systems' Innovation

Training, knowledge exchange and information

AKIS-in-Practice! 3.13

Hands-On Learning Through Multi-Actor Demonstration Projects in the Belgium Flanders AKIS

Keywords/Tags

- Demo-farms
- Peer-to-peer learning
- Dissemination

Potential users

- AKIS coordination bodies
- Advisors and trainers
- Farmers and demonstration farms
- Policy makers and Managing Authorities
- Paying agencies and auditors

RATIONALE

The Belgium-Flanders AKIS is characterized by the strong presence of universities, practice centres, and ILVO as leading institutions. Despite these strengths, a system analysis highlighted certain weaknesses. According to the CAP Strategic Plan (CSP), the knowledge flows from research to advisory services and continuing education are fragmented, and advisors are often under-integrated in innovation initiatives such as EIP and demonstration projects. Farmers frequently report that available training is either too generic or insufficiently tailored to their farm-specific needs, while cooperation between research and practice does not always lead to rapid uptake of innovations at farm level. As a result, key priorities within the Belgium-Flanders AKIS strategy have been to strengthen knowledge flows and connections between research and practice, improve knowledge of advisors and their interconnection within the AKIS, foster cross-border interactive innovation, and support the digital transition in agriculture to improve knowledge sharing.

In response to these priorities, the Flemish Government through the Agency for Agriculture and Fisheries introduced demonstration projects as part of its central interventions. These projects aim to ensure the smooth transfer of research results into practice by providing farmers with hands-on, on-farm exposure to sustainable techniques and innovations that have been proven effective but are not yet widely adopted on farms. Designed following a multi-actor approach, demonstration projects bring together researchers, advisors, and practitioners to co-organize peer-to-peer learning activities using demonstration farms. The demonstration farms involved vary each year, which helps to maintain farmers' interest and increase visibility across Belgium-Flanders.

SOLUTION

Under the CAP Strategic Plan, the Flemish Government supported and coordinated the implementation of multi-actor demonstration projects. Each year, competitive calls are launched, with a maximum budget of EUR 100,000 per project and a project duration of two years. The project promoter – often a practical research organization – acts as the main beneficiary, managing funds and coordinating partners, demonstration farms, and experts involved in the activities.

At the heart of the initiative is a strong focus on multi-actor and peer-to-peer learning. Demonstration projects bring together farmers, advisors, researchers, and experts to jointly design and deliver on-farm demonstrations. Demonstration farms are selected annually according to the specific project topic and are geographically spread across Flanders to ensure broad outreach. Activities supported under the projects include setting up and running on-farm demonstrations, carrying out field trials, collecting and sharing data, benchmarking results with other farms, and disseminating knowledge through training, brochures, press articles, and peer-to-peer exchanges.

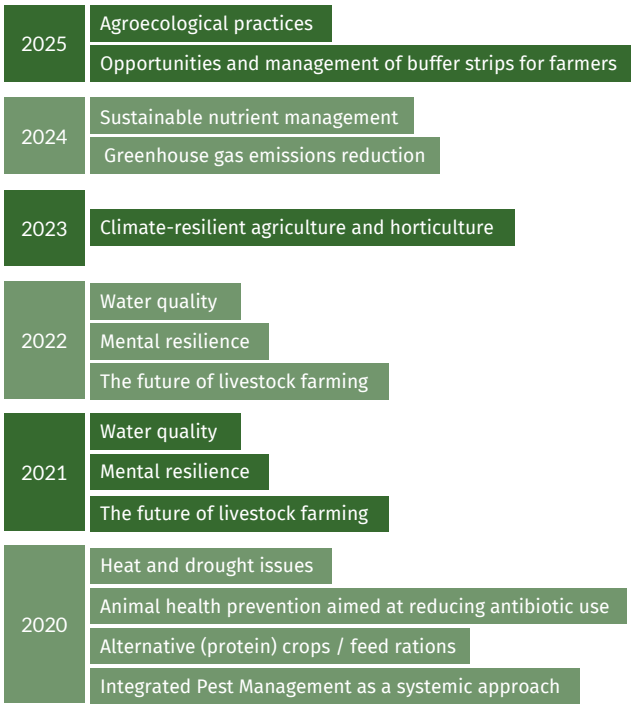
By embedding demonstration projects within the Flemish AKIS strategy and funding them on a recurring basis, the initiative provides farmers with structured opportunities to gain hands-on exposure to sustainable practices and innovations while strengthening knowledge flows and cooperation between research, advisors, and practitioners.

IN PRACTICE

Each year ten demonstration projects are selected and supported through a structured subsidy programme coordinated by the Flemish Government through the Agency for Agriculture and Fisheries. Each year, a competitive call is launched, and selected projects operate on a two-year cycle. The call is organised around specific themes that reflect the main challenges faced by farmers and their related knowledge needs (Figure 1).

Project promoters – typically practical research centres – apply for funding, manage project implementation, and coordinate with demonstration farms, advisors, and other AKIS actors. Approved projects can receive up to EUR 100,000.

Figure 1: Call themes



Demonstration events are practical and field-based, designed to show sustainable techniques and innovations under real farm conditions. These events are simultaneously combined with training sessions, peer-to-peer exchanges, and disseminating materials such as press articles, articles, brochures, and leaflets. Key topics addressed in recent events include reducing agricultural inputs, adopting smart farming technologies, new business models.

To ensure that on-farm demonstrations are relevant, accessible, and showcased across different contexts, different "normal" farms are selected each year based on the project topic and are geographically distributed throughout Belgium-Flanders. This annual rotation of farms ensures continuous novelty, sustains farmer interest, and broadens the reach of knowledge transfer across diverse production systems.

Within this framework, the roles of different actors are clearly defined:

- Demonstration farms are responsible for performing field trials, providing data, disseminating results, and benchmarking practices/results with other farms.
- Project promoters and partners organize the on-farm demonstrations and related dissemination activities, while also gathering and processing data from the farms to feed into broader knowledge-sharing activities.

Demonstration project "Young Farmers, Living Soil"
Theme: Climate resilience
Start year: 2024
Project duration: 30 April 2024 – 29 April 2026
Total project cost: €100,000
Promoter: Catholic Rural Youth and Green Circle

A demonstration project funded under the Flemish CAP Strategic Plan is "Young Farmers, Living Soil" (Jonge Boeren, Levende Grond).

The initiative focuses on promoting soil management as the foundation of sustainable farming, recognising that for young farmers, soil is the living capital on which their future depends — especially in the face of climate change, challenging cultivation conditions, and increasing regulatory demands.

The project combines knowledge exchange, field learning, and community engagement through a diverse set of activities:

- **Two thematic webinars,** available as recordings on the project's website, introduced key concepts of soil health, structure, and management.
- **Five visits to Lighthouse or demonstration farms** allowed participants to observe innovative, agroecological soil practices in real-life conditions and to discuss their applicability in different production systems.
- **Six learning network meetings** were hosted directly on farms, fostering in-depth, multi-actor discussions among farmers, advisors, and researchers on topics such as soil fertility, carbon balance, and erosion prevention.

All funded projects are published in the *Flemish CAP Network's project database.*

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR REPLICABILITY

To replicate this practice, end users should consider several practical aspects:

- Administrative procedures: Projects must apply through annual competitive calls launched by the Government through relevant ministry.
- Funding rules: Maximum budget of €100,000 per project, managed by a project promoter (often a research or advisory organization).
- Partnerships: Projects must follow a multi-actor setup, requiring collaboration between researchers, advisors, demonstration farms, and other AKIS actors.
- Geographical spread: Demonstration farms should be spread across regions to reach diverse audience.
- Organizational setup/Role definition: Project promoters are responsible for organizing demonstrations, managing dissemination activities, and coordinating knowledge exchange.

BENEFITS

- Increased farmer interest through use of “normal” farms rather than research-only stations.
- Annual rotation of farms ensures novelty and continued relevance.
- Enhanced peer-to-peer learning, making adoption of sustainable practices more likely.
- Stronger knowledge flows within the AKIS, connecting farmers, advisors, researchers, and policy makers.
- Practical, hands-on exposure increases farmer confidence in applying sustainable practices.
- By selecting farms and themes according to emerging sectoral challenges (e.g., reducing inputs, smart farming, new business models), demonstrations remain relevant and attractive. Project promotors and project partners are forced/encouraged for every project to select the demonstration farms most progressive in certain techniques and most suitable for a certain topic of the call.
- Strengthens knowledge exchange within the AKIS through practical, farm-based demonstrations.



FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- Demonstratieproject 'Jonge boeren, levende grond'
- Call for demonstration projects: https://lv.vlaanderen.be/voorlichting-info/voorlichting/overzicht-demonstratieprojecten
- Flemish CAP Network's project database
- Poster dedicated to the Flemish experience: https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/events/eu-cap-network-seminar-farm-demonstrations-peer-peer-learning-innovation_en
- Flemish CAP SP: https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/cap-my-country/cap-strategic-plans/belgium-flanders_en?prefLang=it

Belgium - Flanders

Department of Agriculture and Fisheries of the Flemish Government:
Els Lapage
info@lv.vlaanderen.be

modernAKIS Together for Systems' Innovation

Training, knowledge exchange and information

AKIS-in-Practice! 3.14

The DEPHY-Ferme Network: Strengthening Farmer Collaboration and Innovation to Reduce Pesticide Dependence in France

Keywords/Tags

- Demo-farms
- Peer-to-peer learning
- Discussion groups
- Dissemination
- Synergies with H2020/HEU

Potential users

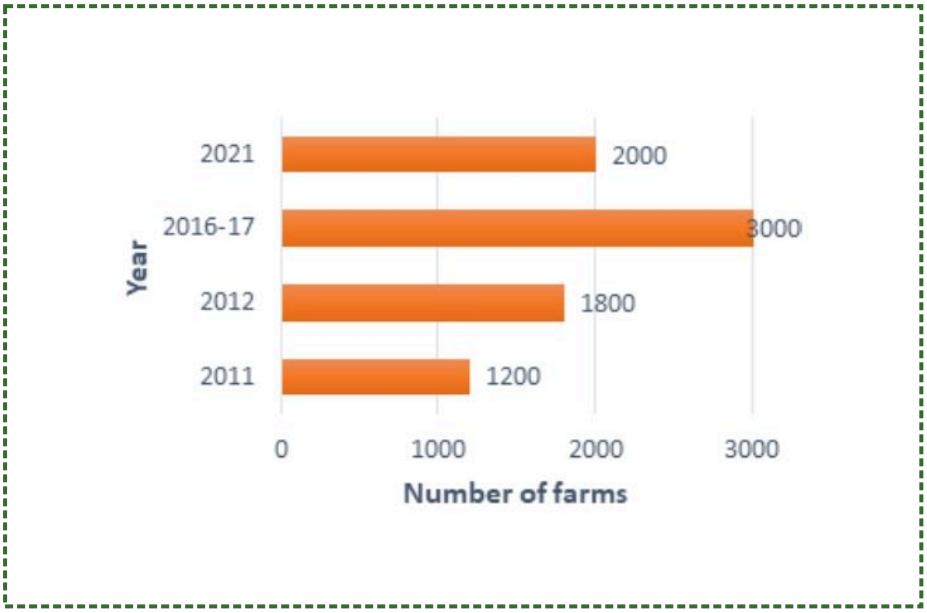
- Farmers and other agricultural workers
- Advisors and trainers
- Research institutions
- Managing Authorities and policymakers
- Paying agencies and auditors
- Innovation support service providers
- AKIS coordination bodies

RATIONALE

Within the French AKIS strategy, a central priority has been to strengthen human capital in agriculture and forestry, improve knowledge dissemination, and promote innovations that meet society expectations and create value. A key focus has been the reduction of pesticide dependence while maintaining farm competitiveness. Analysis of the Agricultural sector revealed several weaknesses: high dependence on pesticides, fragmented knowledge transfer, farmer hesitant to adopt holistic approaches beyond single techniques, reluctance to adopt advice on pesticide use reduction without concrete evidence that alternatives would be both effective and economically viable, and limited cooperation between farmers, advisors, and researchers.

In response, the French Government launched the DEPHY-Ferme network. The network currently comprises of 2,000 farms engaged in a voluntary approach to reducing pesticide use (Figure 1). The farms are organized into 174 groups of around 10-15 farmers each, facilitated by 'Hub coaches' from advisory and development organizations (e.g., chambers of agriculture, CIVAM, organic associations, cooperatives).

Figure 1: Romania AKIS Coordination structure



SOLUTION

The initiative provides a structured solution through the establishment of a national network of demonstration farms, launched by the French Government under the Ecophyto Plan in 2010. It was inspired by earlier initiatives managed by the Chambers of Agriculture and INRAE. The network is structured around the following objectives: promote learning and change dynamics; support innovation processes; capitalize and pool knowledge and resources on economical and multi-performance agricultural techniques and systems; and promote and transfer these systems.

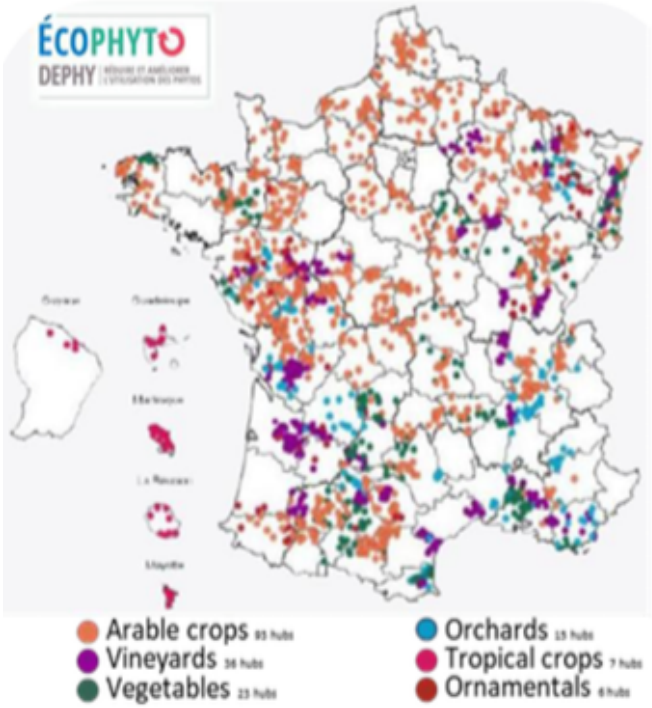
Following a multi-actor approach, the network brings together farmers, advisors, researchers, and experts to jointly design, test, and disseminate pesticide-reduction strategies under real farm conditions.

The hub-coaches (advisers) facilitating groups of farmers play a central role in guiding knowledge exchange, supporting experimentation, and organizing demonstration activities. This structure ensures both farmer-to-farmer learning and wider regional outreach.

Financing is provided through a pesticide tax and the Ecophyto national subsidy scheme, which primarily covers the salaries of hub-coaches and supports network activities. The funding is renewed each year. Participation is voluntary, with farmers motivated by the opportunity to test innovations, share experiences, and reduce reliance on pesticides while maintaining competitiveness.

Currently, the network includes around 2,000 farms geographically distributed across France to ensure broad outreach. To ensure sectoral diversity, DEPHY farms cover all the major French production sectors (Figure. 2). These farms include 90 agricultural high school farms, around 750 organic farms and farms contributing to the national epidemiological surveillance network as part of the Plant Health Bulletin (22% of DEPHY farms provide plots for observations and 13% carry out observations directly). On-farm demonstration activities supported under the initiative include demonstrations of holistic approaches to pest management as well as specific non-chemical methods such as mechanical weeding, biocontrol, and resistant cultivars. Other activties include dissemination of booklets describing individual IPM strategies, farmer testimonies at agricultural events, videos, podcasts, and scientific articles based on farm-generated datasets

Figure 2: Distribution of DEPHY farm across france and by produciotm sectors



IN PRACTICE

Each DEPHY-Ferme group meets regularly for co-innovation workshops, field discussions, and demonstration events. Together with their hub-coach, farmers identify local challenges, test holistic IPM solutions on their farms, and share their experiences with peers. Hub-coaches coordinate knowledge exchange on IPM, help farmers identify site-specific solutions, and organize demonstration events to inspire other farmers in the region.

Moreover, DEPHY-Ferme is affiliated with the IPMWORKS network, which spans 16 European countries, further strengthening international collaboration and knowledge transfer. DEPHY-ferme was clearly a source of inspiration when designing the European network IPMWORKS.

Demonstration activities are field-based and practical, designed to showcase the effectiveness of pesticide-reduction strategies under real farm conditions. These are complemented by farmer testimonies at agricultural events, open days, and the production of dissemination materials such as booklets, videos, podcasts, and scientific articles. By combining farm-level experimentation with structured knowledge-sharing, DEPHY-Ferme ensures that lessons learned benefit both local communities and the wider agricultural sector.

Key activities carried out by DEPHY-Ferme over the years include:

- On-farm demonstrations of holistic IPM strategies.
- Testing specific non-chemical methods (e.g., mechanical weeding, biocontrol, resistant cultivars).
- Sharing experiences at agricultural events through testimonies, field visits, and open days.
- Producing booklets and other materials describing individual IPM strategies.
- Disseminating results through videos, podcasts, and testimonies.
- Contributing to scientific publications based on datasets from participating farms.

Within the framework of the network, the roles of different actors are clearly defined:

- Demonstration farmers: test innovations, host demonstration events, share results with peers, and provide detailed farm data to calculate indicators of pesticide use, environmental impacts, and economic performance.
- Hub-coach advisers: facilitate group learning, coordinate knowledge exchange, support experimentation, and organize regional demonstration and dissemination activities.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR REPLICABILITY

To replicate this practice, end users should consider several practical aspects:

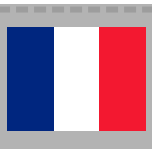
- Administrative framework: Requires a clear legal and policy basis (e.g., integration into a national pesticide-reduction or sustainable farming strategy, such as the French Ecophyto Plan) to ensure stable, long-term funding and institutional legitimacy.
- Organizational model: Works best in small groups (10–15 farmers) coordinated by a skilled advisor (hub-coach).
- Costs: Main financial requirement is funding for advisor salaries, and demonstration activities.
- Funding: Public funding mechanisms, ideally through subsidies or earmarked taxes.
- Data management: Collection of detailed farm-level data is crucial for evaluating pesticide reduction and economic performance, and for producing evidence to influence adoption.
- Farm diversity and distribution: Include diverse farm types (e.g., arable, livestock, orchards, vineyards, organic system) spread across country, on diverse soil types, in diverse climates, and diverse economic contexts (e.g. specific local markets for specific crops, etc).

BENEFITS

- Reduced pesticide dependence through practical, on-farm testing of holistic and non-chemical alternatives.
- Farmer-to-farmer learning enabled by small groups and hub-coaches, fostering trust and peer exchange.
- Stronger innovation capacity by linking farmers, advisers, researchers, and schools in a living network.
- Evidence-based decision-making supported by farm-level data on environmental, economic, and social performance.
- Sustainable outreach and replicability through national funding, diverse farm participation, and EU-level collaboration.

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- https://ipmworks.net/dephy-ferme/
- https://agriculture.gouv.fr/le-reseau-dephy-partout-en-france-des-systemes-de-production-performants-et-economes-en-pesticides#section-1
- https://ecophytopic.fr/dephy/le-dispositif-dephy-ferme
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=loLqHcvr51M&list=PLExrLoicKyXHY-CcfWn7vqeA8nrwRfdSI
- https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/events/eu-cap-network-seminar-farm-demonstrations-peer-peer-learning-innovation_en
- https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/cap-my-country/cap-strategic-plans/france_en?prefLang=it



France

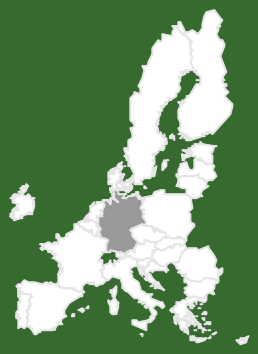
National Research Institute for Agriculture, Food and Environment- INRAE:
Nicolas Munier-Jolain
nicolas.munier-jolain@inrae.fr

modernAKIS Together for Systems' Innovation

Training, knowledge exchange and information

Get-inspired4AKIS! 3.15

Digital Experimentation at Farm Level: Bridging Research and Practice for Smarter Agriculture



Keywords/Tags

- Digitalization in agriculture
- Innovation network
- Multi-actor approach
- Knowledge transfer
- Sustainable farming practices

Potential users

- Managing Authorities of CAP SPs
- AKIS coordination bodies
- Advisory services and innovation support providers
- Farmers and producer organizations
- Universities and applied research centers
- Agri-tech companies and start-ups
- Trainers and vocational education providers
- Policy-makers designing digital strategies in agriculture

RATIONALE

Agricultural innovation and digitalization are core pillars of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), supporting all strategic objectives. Germany's AKIS strategy strongly emphasizes digital tools to enhance sustainability, competitiveness, and resource efficiency. Digitalization enables precision farming and better decision-making but adoption remains slow due to limited dissemination and farmer reluctance. EIP-Agri was created to bridge this gap, ensuring research results reach practice. CAP funds pilot projects, Operational Groups, and dissemination—not research—making peer-to-peer learning and field demonstrations essential. Coordinating EU and national initiatives allows timely knowledge transfer and feedback loops, embedding innovation into vocational training and strengthening digital skills for farmers and advisors. This is very important especially in view of the AKIS strategies under the future CAP programming period.

SOLUTION

Source: BMLEAH

As part of the digitalization strategy, the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Home Affairs (BMLEH) launched the program “Digital Experimental Fields” in 2019. This initiative is funded by a national fund amounting to approximately 70 million euros for the period 2019 to 2025. It encompasses various activities such as collaborative pilots, peer learning, targeted training for farmers and advisors, hackathons, and more. The aim is to advance the development of digital technologies and methods, facilitate knowledge transfer into agricultural practice, and accelerate the adoption of digital innovations and artificial intelligence across the country.

In this context, the project acts as a bridge between research and practice, lowering barriers to digital adoption while ensuring that solutions are demand-driven and farmer-oriented.

So far, in this framework, 14 experimental fields have been established, eight future farms, which are digitally advanced in using technology to improve productivity, sustainability, and competitiveness while supporting climate, environmental, and animal welfare goals, were launched in 2022 and a competence network has been founded in order to connect the experimental fields with each other and with other representatives from politics, science and associations. The experimental fields are digital test beds on farms where, for instance, the goal is to investigate how digital technologies may be utilized most effectively to save the environment, enhance biodiversity and animal welfare, and make work easier. These fields provide a multi-actor approach combining farmers’ practical knowledge with research institutions’ expertise and technology providers’ innovations. In the same framework, practitioners may learn more about the potential of agricultural digitalization by contacting the experimental fields.

The digital experimental fields explore a range of subjects, including the application of the new 5G mobile communication standard in farming, the ideal cooperation of agricultural machinery through digital data sharing in crop production to minimize fertilizer and pesticide use, the compassionate management of dairy cows using digital technologies, and the implementation of these technologies on small farms.

IN PRACTICE

Farmers, advisors, technology providers, research institutions, and CAP Network representatives are actively engaged in knowledge exchange through a range of activities, including:

- **Field demonstrations** of precision farming technologies and sensor-based systems.
- **Peer-to-peer workshops** hosted on experimental farms.
- **FarmWissen platform** consisting of a "wiki" containing the necessary definitions and tutorials for improving basic digital skills.
- **Digital skills training** for farmers and advisors using interactive modules.
- **Open days and webinars** to showcase results and collect feedback.
- **A competence network**, which, composed by spokespersons from the experimental fields, future-oriented businesses, and future-oriented regions, as well as other experts from academia and associations, discusses current results, challenges and solutions in and with the experimental fields in regular meetings.

EXAMPLES OF EXPERIMENTAL FARMS

AgriSens-DEMMIN 4.0
Uses remote sensing and geoinformation to optimize crop production, applying digital techniques to solve practical agricultural challenges and improve resource efficiency.

DigiMilch
Focuses on digitalization in milk production, documenting farmers' experiences with technology and evaluating its effectiveness across the entire dairy process chain.

FarmerSpace
Provides a collaborative platform for testing digital crop protection tools, ensuring solutions meet practical needs and integrate seamlessly into farm management systems through advisor-farmer cooperation.

- The **experimental field conference** (Berlin, April 27-28, 2023), that featured presentations and discussions with participants from politics, research, and practice on progress in the transformation of agriculture achieved within the framework of the projects, as well as on further areas for action.

- **Hackathon for digital solutions** (Berlin, September 2-3, 2024), on the topic of "Managing Bureaucracy in Agriculture – How Can Digital Technologies Support?" that brough 15 participants had the unique opportunity to demonstrate their innovation and programming skills over a period of 22 hours in individual challenges on various current agricultural topics and to work together as a team to find solutions to the problems: Challenge 1 "Is this also available digitally? Digitizing documentation requirements for more time in the barn"; Challenge 2 "Application of pesticides – How can LLMs support?"; Challenge 3 "Making open geodata usable on the farm"; Challenge 4 "Optimizing pasture documentation for the application process".

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR REPLICABILITY

- **Separation of funding streams:** Research and experimentation remain outside CAP funding, but CAP can finance complementary activities such as dissemination, vocational training, and advisory services.
- **Mapping the experimental farms**, by a clear identification of digital solutions under experimentation
- **Establish the network** of experimental farms and a dedicated committee. The projects were implemented through a partnership between farms, research institutions, advisors, and technology providers. Replication would require building such consortia and ensuring active farmer involvement.
- **Tailoring results for farms:** Use CAP-funded advisory services to adapt experimental findings to real farm conditions through personalized guidance and technical support.
- **Dissemination actions:** Organize field demonstrations, peer-to-peer workshops, and digital campaigns under CAP networks to showcase benefits and build trust among farmers.
- **Capacity building:** Develop vocational training programs for farmers and advisors focused on digital skills and innovation adoption, leveraging CAP's knowledge exchange measures.
- **Ensure compliance with data protection rules** (e.g. GDPR in the EU) to cope with sensitive farm and environmental data.

BENEFITS

- Strengthens cooperation between farmers, researchers, and advisors.
- Provides practical evidence on the usability of digital tools.
- Encourages farmer-driven innovation.
- Accelerates digital adoption in rural areas.
- Reduces risks and uncertainties for farmers when investing in new technologies.
- Supports national sustainability and climate goals through optimized input use.



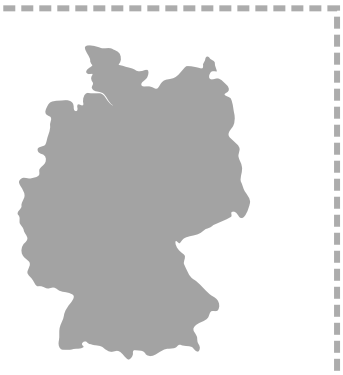
FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- BMLEH - Digitalisation - Digital fields of experimentation – a contribution to digitalisation in agriculture.
- BMLEH - Practice Reports - Map of Digital Experimental Fields.
- BLE - Digitization.
- BLE - Experimental Fields.

Germany

Deputy Director General for Digital and Data Policy, Innovation and Transfer
German Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture and Home Affairs
Prof. Dr. Engel Arkenau
ual82@bmel.bund.de

Watch this AKIS-in-Practice!



modernAKIS Together for Systems' Innovation

Training, knowledge exchange and information

AKIS-in-Practice! 3.16

Knowledge transfer programs in Estonia

Keywords/Tags

- Knowledge transfer
- Study-visits

Potential users

- Managing Authorities
- AKIS Coordination Bodies

RATIONALE

The Rural Development Programme (RDP) and the current CAP Strategic Plans provide financial support for vital knowledge transfer and training across the agriculture, food, and forestry sectors. To fully maximize the impact of this funding and unlock the sector's potential, Estonia recognized a strategic opportunity to move beyond previously scattered and individual efforts in knowledge delivery. While many different actors were active, there was a clear need to establish greater coherence and coordination to prevent unnecessary overlaps and ensure a unified flow of information. To successfully integrate research, training, and practice, a fundamental shift was required towards a strategically aligned and comprehensive multi-actor system capable of ensuring that public investments translate into widespread and coordinated knowledge adoption across the entire industry.

SOLUTION

The solution was the establishment of **Knowledge Transfer Programmes**, procured via public tenders, that strategically consolidated scattered knowledge efforts into a comprehensive, multi-actor initiative (ÜhendPIP, 2021-2025). Implemented under the Estonian Rural Development Programme (RDP) since 2015, the program initially ran as eight sectoral efforts before being merged into this broader, strategically aligned system.

This consolidation was driven by the aim to streamline and coordinate knowledge transfer actions under one umbrella, ensuring a more holistic approach and improving the functioning of the AKIS by fostering collaboration and strengthening links between research, training providers, and practice.

1. Key Elements of the Solution:

- Multi-Actor Consortium: The shift involved long-term programming with a multi-actor consortium, marking a significant step toward a co-creative mindset among knowledge providers. The consortia consisted of the most skilled organisations in terms of providing necessary thematic knowledge transfer actions :

1. Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce.
2. Organic Farming Cooperation Association.
3. Food Industry Association.
4. University of Life Sciences.
5. Lead: Centre of Rural Research and Knowledge (METK, research entity, national rural/CAP network support unit, advisory services representative and AKIS centre since 2023).

- **Comprehensive Scope:** The programmes cover a broad scale of nine critical sectors for 2021-2025: (1) horticulture, (2) plant production, (3) animal husbandry, (4) organic production, (5) food safety (6) support of CAP interventions, (7) cooperative management, (8) digitalisation and (9) horizontal view for everything else which fall into all or none of the foredescribed sectors.
- **Strategic Alignment:** The primary goals were multifaceted: to create an effective system for knowledge exchange, implement knowledge transfer activities, continue developing and updating the digital knowledge repository, and systematically incorporate the sector's needs when organizing activities.
- **Peer-to-Peer Planning:** By uniting knowledge providers, the program established a platform for organizers to discuss and align the topics covered in each individual activity. This coordinated approach facilitates the alignment of supported actions and ensures a more effective distribution of resources.

The tender expectation for this programme covered information actions, website and considering the needs of beneficiaries, but METK took the example of rural networking into a new level by bringing together the knowledge provides as well. Now, as all supported actions were seen to everybody from the start of planning, there were more possibilities to align the topics covered in each individual activity. The knowledge transfer organisers had a platform to discuss among the peers.

IN PRACTICE

The project covered most of national supported knowledge transfer actions (M01 in RDP 2014-2020) under one umbrella for several years. Multi-actor consortia implement the knowledge transfer programme with the goal to provide more efficient and coherent information and knowledge flows to the agricultural and food sector. The programme was implemented in accordance with the development needs of Estonian agricultural and food production sector and with the goals of various policies and development plans. Knowledge transfer activities were organized by involving various parties both in the decision-making process and in the implementation of activities. Also jointly conducted constant and systematic evaluation of activities are used in further improvement of the programme.

Due to the broad scope of the ÜhendPIP, the program had multiple decision-making bodies: a Steering **Committee** and four **Thematic Councils**. Main tasks of these groups were: monitoring program progress, representing target group needs, deciding on the distribution of sectoral budgets, selecting activities to be funded, evaluating completed activities, and planning follow-up activities. The joint implementers were responsible for planning and properly conducting their respective activities.

1. **2015-2022:** sectoral knowledge transfer programs.
2. **2020-2021**: forming the overarching consortia in a co-creative way, discussions with potential board members (stakeholder representatives), submission of proposal and procurement in open dialogue format.
3. **2021 April:** launch of the programme ÜhendPIP.
4. **September to November yearly:** consultation of the sectoral working groups and steering group; preparation and implementation of annual working programs (action plan).
5. **Execution of the planned activities:** regular discussions with division managers within the consortia; Regular reporting (twice a year) for the ministry; monthly payment declarations for Paying Agency, internal newsletter and weekly public newsletter.
6. **2025 June:** final reporting and End of the program

The knowledge transfer programs, supported a wide array of actions primarily aimed at disseminating existing knowledge and innovative solutions in agriculture, food, and the rural economy, and coordinating these activities. These actions – conferences, infodays, trainings, discussion groups, demonstration actions, study-trips, text and audio-visual materials - were designed to improve the knowledge, skills, and competitiveness of target groups, including farmers, food processors, and rural entrepreneurs. Continuous mapping of target group needs and collection of feedback from participants were integral parts of the programs, informing future activities.

- The program organized 869 participant-based activities, 217 in average per year with 10,192 participants. These included 70 conferences, 521 info days, 170 training courses, 55 demonstrations events, and 21 discussion groups.
- Number of participates was 40,943 in total, 10,000 per year in average (for comparison in 2024, there was 12,000 applicants for single area payment and 33,000 persons employed in agriculture and food processing).

A significant aspect was the continued development and updating of an electronic information platform (teabesalv), primarily accessible via www.pikk.ee. This platform consolidates electronic materials under a user-friendly interface to effectively reach target groups using modern digital formats. The maintenance included updating event calendars, uploading presentations and materials, creating new content, improving website design and user-friendliness, enhancing search capabilities. Automated newsletters, such as "Pikk.ee uudised," were launched to keep subscribers informed about new content and upcoming events.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR REPLICABILITY

The success of Estonia's Knowledge Transfer Programmes offers key practical insights for replicating a sustainable and systemic AKIS structure:

- Establish a Long-Term, Systemic AKIS Structure: Systematically build and sustain AKIS connections by establishing a robust, long-term multi-actor framework. The successful implementation justifies designating a central, semi-governmental entity (such as a research and development agency) to act as the National AKIS Operational Centre for future CAP periods, embedding the structure in practice.
- Invest in Facilitator Capacity Building: Systematically invest in the skills development and capacity building of the facilitators and managers involved. Successful networking requires a combination of both personal characteristics and essential methodological skills in knowledge management.
- Ensure Operational Costs are Eligible: Design the knowledge transfer program within the RDP/CAP framework to explicitly allow and plan for the eligibility of day-to-day management costs. This avoids limitations associated with managing long-term, complex actions solely through restrictive instruments like competitive public tenders (e.g., M01 activities procured via public calls).

Programme has increased the confidence of many people from different sectors to take the lead in networking and further disseminating gained knowledge either by discussion groups or setting up training of trainers' activities. E.g., after the set of cooperative management trainings, a meat producers' cooperative was established. Now this cooperative itself is a role model and organiser of series of new trainings. Also, after two years of discussion groups and cross-visits a cooperative of organic honey producers was established. Experience has shown that it will take several gatherings to build the trust for such official engagement – and the knowledge exchange programme has contributed hugely to provide safe space for such development

BENEFITS

The programs covered most of national supported knowledge transfer actions (M01 in RDP 2014-2020: trainings, conferences, demo-events, publications, websites) under one umbrella for several years.

Here's how the AKIS concept was implemented and contributed to:

- Overarching Framework: The entire structure and operations of ÜhendPIP adhered to the AKIS concept. The program's fundamental goal was to disseminate existing knowledge and innovative solutions in agriculture, food, and rural economy, along with coordinating these knowledge transfer activities. This coordinated effort sought to avoid duplication and ensure more effective knowledge transfer, The knowledge transfer of different farming and food producing sectors in one project allowed focus to every important aspect (from basic info up to innovative solutions) and also cross-sectoral overview so no aspect is overlooked or overbooked
- Multi-Actor Collaboration: The program was executed through a consortium of key partners, strengthening the collaborative way of actions for the extremely different consortia partners to familiarise in working together. These shared implementers collaboratively planned and conducted activities, with each responsible for their specific tasks.
- Decision-Making and Coordination Bodies: The program established multiple decision-making bodies to ensure broad engagement and strategic alignment. This included a steering committee and four thematic councils for specific fields. The steering committee and councils, involved representatives from various organizations, ministries, and agencies. This structure aimed to ensure that activities were decided upon with consideration of diverse sectoral needs.
- Strengthening links between Research and Practice: The program facilitated presentations at experimental stations and research centers, and involved both practitioners and researchers in events and panel discussions to bridge the gap between scientific findings and practical application. Feedback from events often highlighted the value of practical sessions and insights from working farms.
- Holistic set of skills: Project has contributed to development of soft skills as well as hard skills including the longer-term building of capacity (human capital such as management skills) and social capital (openness to collaboration/cooperation/partnership working). The importance to support the develop management and social skills of farm/enterprise owners are often neglected in many ways. The project organised a set of trainings and discussion groups which gave possibilities for the experienced ones and newcomers to see each other and exchange experiences.
- Supporting Interactive Innovation: Examples of innovation activities were presented on the information portal through tables, news, and presentations.
- Enhancing Advisory Services: Advisors were actively involved as lecturers in events and as authors of materials.
- Supporting Digital Transition: Emphasis was placed on digital solutions, including showcasing agricultural robotics, utilizing data for farm management (e.g., herd health, carbon farming), and maintaining web applications like the plant protection monitoring system. Online events were widely used, and recordings were made available for later viewing, though this sometimes reduced active participation during live events.
- Needs Assessment and Feedback: Continuous mapping of target group needs and collecting feedback from participants were integral to refining future activities. However, feedback collection was noted to have challenges, with low response rates to electronic surveys and the need for more in-depth, direct engagement to capture nuanced needs. The feedback of the events was gathered from the participants after every action either in written or oral form. The conclusions and recommendations of trainers and organisers were systematically collected and assessed twice a year per sector and in a horizontal overview.

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- Knowledge transfer programs website: https://www.pikk.ee/valdkonnad/teadmussiirde-pikaajalised-programmid/uhendpip/

Estonia

METK (ÜhendPIP project manager):
Hanna Tamsalu
hanna.tamsalu@metk.agri.ee

modernAKIS Together for Systems' Innovation

Training, knowledge exchange and information

AKIS-in-Practice! 3.17

Innov'action Sharing of innovation in a multiactor channel

Keywords/Tags

- Demo-farms
- Peer-to-peer learning
- CAP Network
- Discussion groups
- Study visits
- Info days
- Dissemination

Potential users

- Managing Authorities
- AKIS coordination bodies
- Auditors and certifying bodies
- Partners of OGs
- Advisors
- Innovations support services providers
- Trainers

RATIONALE

Agriculture today faces unprecedented challenges requiring rapid adoption of innovative practices. While innovation is essential for achieving multi-performance goals (economic, environmental, and social), its dissemination and embedment at scale remain difficult. Innovations often stay confined to pilot farms or research projects, failing to reach the broader farming community.

The question is critical: how can innovation be effectively shared among all actors involved in the dissemination and embedment phase—farmers, advisors, cooperatives, research institutions, and policymakers? Without structured mechanisms for collaboration and knowledge transfer, the risk is that promising solutions will not translate into widespread practice, undermining efforts to modernize agriculture.

Within the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) framework, this challenge becomes strategic. CAP emphasizes the integration of agricultural advisory and innovation support services into AKIS to accelerate innovation uptake and support ecological and digital transitions. However, integration alone is insufficient; it must be paired with systematic approaches for scaling innovation, ensuring that advisors and other key actors act as conduits for knowledge rather than isolated intermediaries.

SOLUTION

Innov'action, coordinated by the Chambres d'Agriculture, is a national initiative in Occitanie designed to promote agricultural innovation through a label and a series of open-door events. These events showcase pioneering farmers' innovations, aiming to identify and celebrate innovative practices, promote knowledge sharing between farmers and advisors, and integrate innovation into farm management.

The objectives are:

- Detect and promote innovative farmers.
- Facilitate knowledge transfer between farmers and advisors.
- Integrate innovation into farm decision-making.
- Support multi-performance goals: economic, social, and environmental.

IN PRACTICE

Innov'action operates through farm-based demonstration days organized regionally. Each year, hundreds of farms host events where farmers present 4–5 innovations (e.g., forage autonomy via hedgerows, photovoltaic hay drying, mechanical chestnut harvesting, renewable energy solutions). Activities include:

- Farm tours guided by host farmers.
- Technical presentations by advisors.
- Hands-on demonstrations of equipment and practices.
- Peer-to-peer exchanges in small groups (10–15 participants) to encourage discussion. Events are supported by local partners (cooperatives, suppliers, research institutes) and funded by Chambers of Agriculture with public contributions. In some regions, digital formats (virtual tours, webinars) complement physical visits. Since its inception, Innov'action has scaled from Brittany to a national program, with over 200 events attracting 20,000+ visitors annually.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR REPLICABILITY

For advisors:

- An allocated time for an advisor to coordinate the activity,
- Willingness to share the results of the innovation between the different network of advisors

For farmers:

- Farmer-Centered Approach and acceptance of farmers to share practices, to allow peer-to-peer learning and farm demonstrations.

For public funders:

- Institutional coordination, funding and governance to ensure consistency and scalability across regions.
- Multi-Actor engagement based on clear roles and collaboration among farmers, advisors, cooperatives, and research institutions.
- Communication and visibility through media and digital tools for attracting participants and sharing outcomes.
- Adequate funding, technical support, and human resources are critical for organizing and sustaining events.
- Monitoring and Evaluation: feedback tools and impact metrics should measure adoption rates and guide continuous improvement.

BENEFITS

- Creating spaces for innovation visibility and exchange through bridging the gap between research and practice.
- Fostering of a collaborative environment that inspires learning throughout the agricultural community.
- Identification and promotion of innovative farmers, through supporting knowledge exchange with advisors.
- Accessibility and visibility of innovative farming solutions regionally.
- Ensuring of feasibility by uniting actors under the common banner “Innov’action.”

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Website of innov'action initiative:

- https://occitanie.chambres-agriculture.fr/sinformer/rd-et-innovation/innovaction

Occitanie- France

Myriam GASPARD:
myriam.gaspard@occitanie.hambagri.fr

modernAKIS Together for Systems' Innovation

Training, knowledge exchange and information

Get-inspired4AKIS! 3.18

Innovative Master's Program in Agricultural Advisory Services: Building Competence for Future AKIS

Keywords/Tags

- Training
- Master course
- Advisory services
- Innovation Support Services

Potential users

- Research Institutes and Universities
- AKIS Coordination Bodies
- Managing Authorities
- Trainers and Education Providers
- Advisory Services and Innovation Support Services

RATIONALE

In the context of the evolving Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the increasing emphasis on strengthening Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS), there is a growing need for highly skilled professionals who can facilitate knowledge exchange, innovation, and learning among farmers and rural actors. Germany, like many other EU Member States, is experiencing evolving demands on advisory services due to increasing complexity in agricultural systems and sustainability challenges. This calls for professionals who are not only technically knowledgeable but also equipped with social science-based competencies to support innovation, learning, and collaboration. The University of Hohenheim identified this gap and developed a dedicated Master's program to address it.

SOLUTION

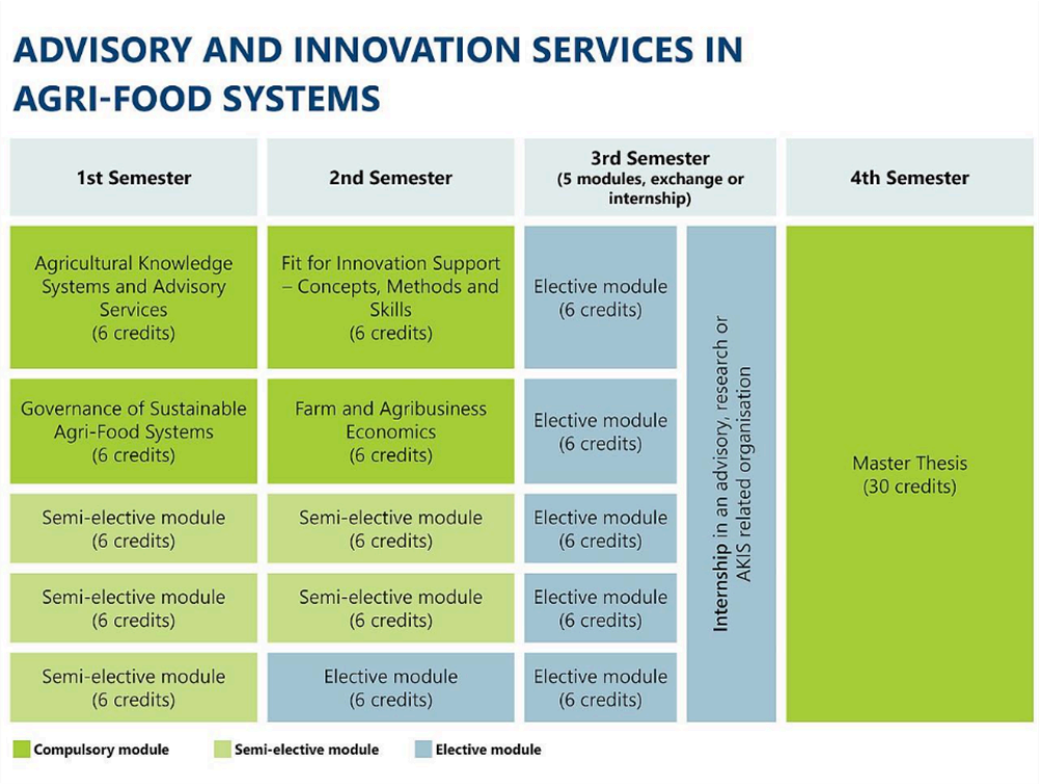
To meet this strategic need, the University of Hohenheim launched in 2024 a new program in "Advisory and Innovation Services in Agri-Food Systems" within its international Master's program in Agricultural Sciences. The program combines a solid foundation in advisory science with practical skills for facilitating change and innovation in agriculture and rural development. It is designed to train future advisors who can operate effectively in diverse contexts and support the transformation towards more sustainable and resilient agri-food systems.

IN PRACTICE

The Master's major is structured as a two-year full-time program taught in English. It integrates theoretical foundations in agricultural production, economics, and engineering with social science competences and skills for consulting and innovation promotion, thus developing a distinct professional profile for the service sector. Students follow a modular curriculum that includes:

- Compulsory courses that build foundational knowledge in advisory services, agricultural knowledge and innovation systems, governance of sustainable agri-food systems, and farm and agribusiness economics.
- Practical training in communication, facilitation, and innovation support methods relevant to advisory practice.
- Hands-on engagement through case-based learning and the option to complete an internship combined with a seminar paper in real-world advisory and innovation contexts.
- Opportunities to tailor the profile through semi-elective modules on topics such as policy processes, sustainability marketing, digital agriculture, or rural development.

The program equips graduates with the capacity to analyze systemic problems and effectively manage and implement change processes within farm operations and agri-food value chain networks.



The **compulsory modules** constitute the core of the program, providing the essential knowledge and competencies required to obtain the M.Sc. degree. The **semi-elective modules** enable students to broaden and deepen their understanding of topics related to advisory and innovation services in agri-food systems, while **the elective module**s offer additional flexibility to tailor the study plan to individual interests and career objectives.
Below is the detailed list of the compulsory, semi-elective, and elective modules included in the Master's program.

- **Compulsory Modules:**

- Agricultural Knowledge Systems and Advisory Services
- Governance of Sustainable AgriFood Systems
- Fit for Innovation Support
- Farm and Agribusiness Economics
- Semi-elective Modules
- Quantitative Methods in Biosciences
- Farm System Modelling
- Quantitative Methods in Economics
- Knowledge and Innovation Management
- Policy Processes in Agriculture and Natural Resource Management
- Organic Livestock Farming and Products
- Livestock Production Systems and Development
- Crop Production Systems
- Organic Food Systems and Concepts
- Organic Plant Production
- Innovations for Sustainable Agri-Food Systems
- Sustainability Marketing & Marketing Consulting
- Agricultural and Food Policy
- Precision Farming

- **Elective Modules:**

- Portfolio Module
- UNIcert III English for Scientific Purposes
- UNIcert II Deutsch als Fremdsprache (B2)
- Ethical Reflection on Food and Agriculture
- Communicating Sustainability in Agri Food Systems
- Qualitative Research Methods in Rural Development Studies
- Enacting Local Transformation in the Agri-food System
- Innovation Economics
- Environmental and Resource Economics
- Advisory and Innovation Services Internship

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR REPLICABILITY

- **Institutional setup:** Requires university-level capacity in advisory sciences, including staff with interdisciplinary expertise in communication, agricultural systems, and rural sociology.
- **Accreditation:** The program was developed within the German university system and underwent standard procedures for accreditation of new study programs.
- **Funding:** As a public university, Hohenheim offers the program without tuition fees for EU students, who only pay a semester contribution. Non-EU students are required to pay tuition fees in accordance with the regulations of the state of Baden-Württemberg.
- **International compatibility:** The program is structured in line with the Bologna process and attracts both German and international students.

BENEFITS

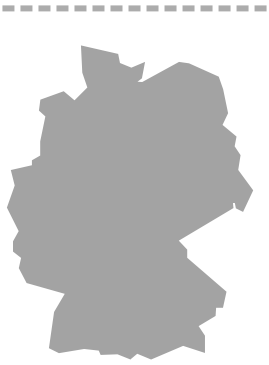
- Trains a new generation of professionals capable of facilitating innovation and learning in agriculture.
- Strengthens advisory capacity within national AKIS.
- Provides students with a unique combination of theory and practice in advisory work.
- Encourages cross-cultural learning and exchange through international student cohorts.
- Supports professionalization and recognition of advisory work as a specialized competence area.

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- Master website: https://www.uni-hohenheim.de/en/agricultural-sciences-masters-major-advisoryservices#jfmulticontent_c552797-1.

Germany

University of Hohenheim:
Professor Dr. Andrea Knierim
andrea.knierim@uni-hohenheim.de



modernAKIS Together for Systems' Innovation

Training, knowledge exchange and information

AKIS-in-Practice! 3.19

Playing to learn the CAP: the PAC Game experience

Keywords/Tags

- Training
- Games
- CAP Network

Potential users

- Managing Authorities
- Advisors and Innovations support services providers
- Education and training institutions
- Researchers
- LAGs

RATIONALE

Making complex policy frameworks such as the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) accessible to non-specialists is often a considerable challenge. The CAP, with its multi-layered architecture of objectives, interventions, conditionalities, and financial instruments, is not always easy to understand, especially for younger generations who may become its future beneficiaries.

Traditional teaching methods or front-line communication strategies frequently risk remaining too abstract or technical, leaving students and, more generally, civil society, with only a partial or superficial understanding.

There is therefore a strong need for innovative approaches that can translate the complexity of the CAP into experiences that are concrete, engaging, and meaningful, allowing learners to grasp not only the technical rules but also the real implications for farmers, rural areas, and society at large. It requires knowledge-transfer techniques able to capture the attention of people on topics that are often unfamiliar yet strategically relevant for their future.

SOLUTION

This challenge was taken up by the C**REA (Council for Agricultural Research and Economics - Centre for Research on Policies and Bioeconomy)** within the "Eccellenze Rurali" initiative (under the Italian National Rural Network project), which disseminates good practices in the use of EU funds for rural development, with a focus on the agriculture–environment nexus and the promotion of youth entrepreneurship.

The opportunity to test an innovative way of informing and educating about CAP arose within the **"RiGenerazione Scuola"** Plan of the Italian Ministry of Education (implementing the UN 2030 Agenda), which supports schools in their ecological/cultural transition and civic-education pathways on sustainable development.

Within this framework, the **Agricultural and Professional Institute "G. Dalmasso" of Pianezza (Turin)**—a large agricultural school with an experimental farm and strong regional relevance—implemented the Eccellenze Rurali module. In the first year (2022/2023), a **"CAP Laboratory"** combined (i) knowledge-transfer sessions (slide-based presentations on CAP) and (ii) a hands-on lab where students designed the school's experimental farm using CAP interventions. The lab involved **8 classes (~160 students), 10 teachers, and 32 training hours.**

The end-of-cycle reflection highlighted the need for a more practical and engaging approach—**accessible yet rigorous, engaging yet scientifically sound**—to stimulate curiosity and critical reflection on agricultural policies among future beneficiaries (aspiring farmers and technicians). The response: build an active-learning tool—a serious game—so students learn by doing: **PAC GAME** is born.

In March 2024, CREA delivered again CAP training at the Dalmasso Institute in Pianezza (Turin) as part of the "Rural Excellence" project and the national "School Regeneration" plan, using the first version of the PAC GAME. The 2024 edition involved 6 classes, 120 students, 10 teachers, and 20 training hours, confirming gamification as an effective way to teach complex CAP topics in an engaging manner.

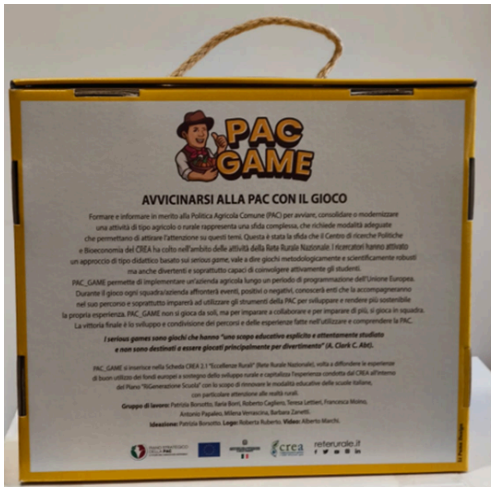
Following the initial pilot at the Dalmasso Institute and subsequent refinement, **PAC GAME** has been successfully deployed across a range of educational and institutional settings. It has been adopted by other secondary agricultural schools and universities, as well as by key actors in rural development—including RDP/RDCPs Managing Authorities, local stakeholders, the Ministry of Agriculture and EU Commission (DG AGRI).

PAC GAME has also been showcased at events, both addressed to professional operator and large public, contributing to broader public engagement and raising awareness among civil society on critical issues such as agricultural policy, sustainability, and the future of farming.

Designed for flexibility, PAC GAME can be easily tailored to meet specific communication and educational objectives. This adaptability has already enabled the development of a customized version for a specific Italian region, demonstrating its potential for localized outreach and strategic alignment with regional priorities.

IN PRACTICE

PAC GAME is a board/simulation game where teams run a farm aiming for economic, environmental, and social sustainability. Roles mirror company functions (entrepreneur, financial manager/treasurer, technical lead, negotiator), and teams make strategic choices on production, CAP schemes, investments, and risk management while facing environmental and market shocks.



A standard PAC GAME session is designed to simulate the dynamics of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in an engaging and educational format. The session unfolds through the following phases:

• **Preparation:**

- Teachers/facilitators receive the game kit (board, cards, tokens, rules).
- Teams of 3–5 students are formed.
- Each student is assigned a specific role within the team (entrepreneur, treasurer, technical expert, negotiator).

• **Game rounds:**

- Each round corresponds to one year within a CAP programming period.
- Teams plan their farm strategy by deciding which crops to cultivate, which CAP interventions to implement, how to allocate resources, and how to meet sustainability requirements.
- They face **unexpected challenges** (e.g. drought, pests, market price shocks) introduced by event cards, forcing them to adapt strategies.
- Negotiation between teams is encouraged (e.g. land purchase, collaborations, joint investments).

• **Accounting:**
- At the end of each round, revenues, costs, subsidies and penalties are calculated.
- Progress is monitored through indicators such as financial stability, environmental performance, and resilience.
• **Debriefing:**
- At the end of the session, the facilitator discusses the outcomes, the decision-making processes, the role of CAP interventions, and the trade-offs experienced by students.

This **experiential dimension** allows learners to "live" the CAP mechanisms, understand the rationale behind different policy instruments, and reflect on their practical impact on farm management and rural development.
An updated version of the game, PAC GAME Easy, will soon be released in both Italian and English — a simplified edition designed to be played even without a facilitator.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR REPLICABILITY

To replicate this practice effectively, some practical elements should be taken into account:

- **Facilitator skills**. A successful PAC Game session requires a facilitator—typically a teacher, advisor, or policy expert—who has at least a basic understanding of the CAP and its instruments. Beyond technical knowledge, facilitation also demands moderation skills and the ability to guide "guided play" sessions, helping students connect game events with real policy measures, and leading the final debrief to consolidate learning.

- **Institutional support**. For wide dissemination, the backing of ministries, regional administrations, AKIS actors, or the CAP Network is crucial. Institutional partners can provide endorsement, integrate the game into existing training or communication programs, and ensure its credibility among schools and stakeholders.

- **Costs and financing.** The direct costs of the game are modest (mainly graphic design, printing of boards and cards, and assembly of kits). However, additional budget is often needed for teacher training, onboarding facilitators, or scaling distribution to multiple schools. The PAC Game can be purchased using Technical Assistance funds, or alternatively through the Communication Plan of the CAP Strategic Plan (CSP), ensuring alignment with official CAP dissemination and education activities.

- **Contextualisation.** To maximise educational effectiveness, the game should be tailored to local realities — for example, adapting productive systems (PS), eco-schemes, CSR interventions, or specific crops and livestock typical of the territory. Such contextualisation makes the learning experience more relevant and increases students' ability to connect the game with their own environment.

- **Updates.** As the CAP evolves with each programming period, the content of PAC Game must also be periodically revised to reflect new regulations, strategic objectives, conditionalities, or support instruments. Regular updates ensure the tool remains accurate, credible, and useful for long-term use in education and training.

BENEFITS

- **From passive to active learning.** Educational gameplay overcomes frontal teaching by turning students into active, favouring participation over passive reception.
- **Guided play**. PAC GAME is guided: the researcher/facilitator pilots CAP knowledge transfer. When teams encounter an intervention, explanations are oriented, shared, and anchored in practice through simulation.
- **Semi-reality and dual objectives.** Students step into a farmer's role pursuing economic viability and sustainability. To enable this "semi-reality," an initial participatory discussion on CAP builds a shared baseline.
- **Subject-centred learning & peer exchange.** Shifting focus from object (policy) to subject (learner) elevates peer-to-peer dynamics; teachers/researchers become co-learners/listeners.

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- https://www.crea.gov.it/web/politiche-e-bioeconomia/-/innovazione-didattica-e-sostenibilit%C3%A0-insegnare-la-pac-con-il-pac-game

Italy

CREA PB:
Patrizia Borsotto
patrizia.borsotto@crea.gov.it
Roberto Cagliero
roberto.cagliero@crea.gov.it

modernAKIS Together for Systems' Innovation

Training, knowledge exchange and information

Get-Inspired4AKIS! 3.20

Certificate Course "Professional Representation Work in Rural Areas" in Austria

Keywords/Tags

- Knowledge exchange
- Knowledge transfer
- Peer-to-peer learning
- Training for farmers
- Female farmers

Potential users

- AKIS Coordination Bodies
- Educational institutions
- Chambers of Agriculture

RATIONALE

The effectiveness of any Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS) hinges on the active and balanced participation of all actors, including women. Despite their critical, day-to-day role in farm management and operations, women farmers are often structurally underrepresented in agricultural and regional decision-making bodies. Austria's AKIS, characterized by its well-integrated research, education, and advisory components, provides a strong foundation. However, to fully capitalise on the knowledge held by women in rural areas and promote gender equality in leadership, there is a clear need for targeted educational opportunities.

SOLUTION

The ZAMm certificate course addresses the structural underrepresentation of women in agricultural and regional decision-making processes, despite their significant role in farm management in Austria. Its aim is to empower women farmers through targeted training to professionally represent their interests and actively engage in committees. Originally developed as part of the nationwide educational project “Zukunftsorienterite Agrarwirtschaftliche Motivation – ZAMm” (Future-Oriented Agricultural Motivation), initiated by the ARGE Bäuerinnen (Working Group of Women Farmers), the program is now independently implemented by the regional Rural Educational Institutes.

Implementation and planning are the responsibility of the respective regional Rural Educational Institutes in all federal states. The program aligns with the objectives of the national CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027, particularly in promoting knowledge transfer, gender equality, and active participation in rural areas. It addresses the need for qualified representation and enhances the visibility of women’s voices in agricultural policy discourse.

IN PRACTICE

The ZAMm certificate course is implemented by the regional Rural Educational Institutes, which independently decide whether and when to offer it. While participants must be managing a farm, the program is open to all interested women in rural areas, regardless of whether they already hold a position in a committee or have prior political experience.

The program comprises five two-day modules, totaling 80 teaching units (á 50 minutes). All modules are delivered in person and follow a standardized structure across all federal states. Topics include personal development, agricultural policy and economics, the political landscape in Austria, leadership skills, and public relations. An optional study trip to Brussels is also offered.

The methodology includes lectures, group work, practical exercises, and a personal development journal. Participants range from young women aged 18 to female retirees, with or without political experience. Each course is limited to 12-17 participants and is typically held annually. An online platform (Moodle/E-Front) supports communication and networking beyond the duration of the course. Examples from real life have shown that if the program is not offered for one or two years, restarting it can be more difficult and momentum may be lost. Annual implementation facilitates continuity, as demand for the certificate course is largely driven by word of mouth.

The content structure and quality assurance are based on a nationwide guideline developed by the Rural Training Institute of Austria (LFI). Evaluation is carried out independently by the implementing regional Rural Educational Institutes. A jury of at least three qualified members evaluates the final assessments. Participants must attend at least 80% of the course to be eligible for completion. The jury also handles complaints and oversees retake procedures, allowing up to three attempts.

Organization and coordination are managed by the education officers of the regional Rural Educational Institutes. They are responsible for planning, promotion, participant selection, and administrative processes. The content is delivered by qualified trainers with expertise in adult education, agricultural policy, communication, and personal development. Courses are held at the educational facilities of the Chambers of Agriculture or in external seminar venues. Funding is provided by the federal states, participant fees, and, where applicable, additional subsidies.

This certificate course is partially funded by the federal and state governments of Austria, as well as the European Union. In addition to public funding, participants are also required to contribute towards the cost of the program. Currently, 80% of the actual costs are covered through subsidies. Importantly, the funding is not based on a flat rate – rather, it is calculated as 80% of the real, documented expenses associated with delivering the course.

Because the funding model is tied to actual costs, the participant fees can vary from one federal state to another. These differences are due to varying cost structures, which may include factors such as venue rental, travel expenses for instructors, and other logistical needs. Each state calculates its program costs independently, which is why participant contributions are not standardized nationwide.

This financial structure ensures that the program remains accessible while maintaining high quality and relevance. It also reflects the program's commitment to providing tailored, regionally adapted training for female farmers who are preparing for or are already engaged in leadership roles within agricultural and rural organizations.This course is currently recognized under the previously approved format and has not yet been revised according to the new guidelines introduced in in the Austrian LE Project Support Program (2023-2027). According to the updated framework, existing certificate courses that were approved with 80% funding only need to be transferred into the new format and resubmitted for approval if any changes are made to their content or structure. In this case, the course may continue to operate under existing approval. However, all such courses are expected to be reviewed and updated to align with the new format likely within the next five years.

To qualify for 80% funding under the new Austrian LE Project Support Program (2023-2027), certificate courses must be officially recognized by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Climate and Environmental Protection, Regions and Water Management (BMLUK). This recognition is granted based on a detailed course guide submitted using a standardized template. This guide must clearly outline the course's target group, objectives, benefits, content, structure, and completion criteria.

Key Approval Criteria for Certificate Programs by the BMLUK

- Accreditation of the Provider: The educational institution must hold a valid Ö-Cert. For forestry-related topics, additional qualifications at the high school level from a forestry school are required.
- Minimum Duration: Courses must include at least 40 instructional units (UE), excluding final assessments. One UE equals 50 minutes.
- Geographic Scope: The course must be offered in at least three federal states or across state borders.
- Modular Structure: The course must be organized into modules that combine theoretical and practical components, using diverse teaching methods.
- Completion Requirements: The guide must transparently describe the mandatory components for successful course completion.

- Relevant Topics: The course must address one or more of the following themes:

1. Plant or animal production.
2. Farm-based diversification (e.g., direct marketing, agritourism, social farming).
3. Environmental protection (soil, water, air, biodiversity).
4. Climate protection and adaptation.
5. Renewable energy and energy efficiency.
6. Forestry (linked to climate adaptation).
7. Safe timber harvesting and tree inspection.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR REPLICABILITY

The successful model for empowering women in rural leadership can be replicated through the following practical steps:

- **Leverage Established Networks:** Build the initiative upon existing, robust networks such as the Chambers of Agriculture and farmer organizations (like the ARGE Bäuerinnen) to ensure outreach and relevance.
- **Ensure Multi-Level Collaboration:** Foster collaboration at both the regional and national levels, particularly by involving qualified trainers directly from established agricultural institutions.
- **Promote Policy Exchange**: Organize study visits (e.g., to national capitals or international political centers like Brussels) to facilitate direct exchange between participants and political institutions or decision-makers.
- **Establish a Digital Platform**: Utilize an online platform (e.g., Moodle/E-Front) to enable continuous communication between participants and program coordinators, sustaining engagement beyond the course duration.
- **Foster Sustainable Peer Exchange**: Actively cultivate peer exchange among participants, regardless of age or experience, to support the development of sustainable networks that transcend regional boundaries.

BENEFITS

- Enhanced Visibility and Equality: It enhances the visibility of female perspectives in agricultural policy and directly contributes to gender equality in rural areas.
- Improved AKIS Knowledge Flows: The program supports essential knowledge flows within the AKIS system by creating valuable new networks and fostering effective exchange between practice and policy.
- Intergenerational Learning: The diversity of participants—ranging from young to senior, with and without political experience—encourages mutual inspiration and develops an important intergenerational understanding of representative work.

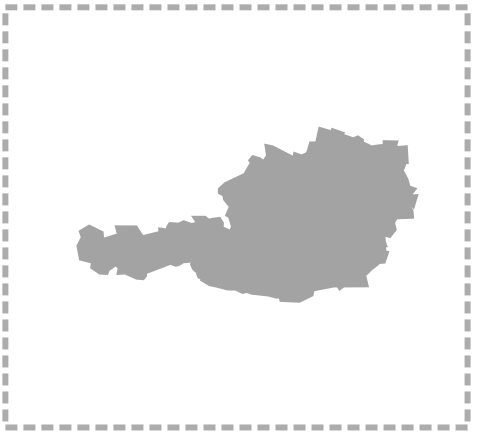
FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- Zertifikatslehrgang „Professionelle Vertretungsarbeit im ländlichen Raum“ | ZAMm unterwegs - ZAMm Lehrgang
- Zertifikatslehrgänge | LFI Österreich

Austria

ARGE Österreichische Bäuerinnen:
DI Michaela Glatzl
m.glatzl@lk-oe.at

Austrian Chamber of Agriculture:
DI Ines Jernej, BEd.
i.jernej@lk-oe.at



modernAKIS Together for Systems' Innovation

Training, knowledge exchange and information

AKIS-in-Practice! 3.21

Bridging the Gap Between Innovation and Agricultural Practice: The Innovation Farm Project

Keywords/Tags

- Interactive Innovation
- Knowledge Transfer
- Advisory Services
- Innovation Support Services

Potential users

- Managing Authorities
- AKIS Coordination Bodies
- Agricultural education providers

RATIONALE

Austria's AKIS is characterized by a diverse and decentralized landscape of actors, including public research institutions, advisory services, universities, and vocational schools. While the system boasts a strong tradition of applied research and regional experimentation, it faces a critical challenge: a significant gap exists between the promise of technological innovation and its verified, practical utility on farms. Farmers and agricultural advisors often struggle to independently assess the real-world utility and economic viability of the numerous digital technologies entering the market. This complexity is compounded by fragmented competencies across the agricultural sector, leading to uncertainty in technology adoption and hindering the systematic translation of developments into tangible benefits, particularly for small and medium-sized farms. There is a clear need for a neutral, independent body to validate these market-ready technologies and ensure unbiased knowledge transfer to the end-users.

SOLUTION

The Innovation Farm project operates within the Austrian AKIS as an independent, non-commercial initiative that bridges the gap between technological innovation and agricultural practice.
It emerged in response to a growing need for clarity and practical relevance in agricultural technology adaptation. The project was initiated in 2020 as main pillar of a nation-wide smart farming-consortium to address this gap by establishing a neutral and independent transfer system which evaluated and disseminates validated knowledge.

INNO VATION FARM
FARMING FOR FUTURE

The project is embedded in the National CAP Strategic Plan and co-financed by the Rural Development Program under the cooperation measure, aiming to foster collaboration among diverse AKIS actors. The funding rate is 80%, with remaining costs being covered by partners or technology providers paying for the testing of their innovations and technologies. Beyond the funded activities, the Innovation Farm engages in additional initiatives to ensure long-term infrastructure sustainability for its activities, for example through fee-based events. It has become a well-known national know-how facility in digital farming.

The aim is not to develop new technologies but rather to test and communicate the applicability of existing, market-ready solutions. It responds to a demand-driven process, where proposals originate from various actors, such as companies, regional sites, sector representatives, and funding bodies. The Innovation Farm thus serves as a strategic instrument to enhance the accessibility and usability of digital technologies in agriculture, particularly for small and medium-sized farms.

IN PRACTICE

The Innovation Farm operates as a cooperative project involving many organizations, including several public research facilities, all regional Chambers of Agriculture, the Rural Educational Institutes, as well as universities, teaching institutions and agricultural associations. It operates across four specialized sites in Austria: Wieselburg, Raumberg-Gumpenstein, Mold, and Klosterneuburg. Use cases are grouped into four distinct thematic areas: 1) arable farming, 2) grassland management, 3) livestock systems, and 4) viticulture & fruit production. Each site is responsible for testing technologies relevant to its domain, with thematic boundaries clearly defined. Project partners vary from use case to use case, depending on the thematic focus, technical requirements, and the expertise needed for each evaluation.

Importantly, the project itself does not conduct webinars, presentations or direct training sessions on the results from the individual projects and testings. Instead, the results of its use cases are discussed in working groups, which define how the gathered knowledge can be transferred to farmers in the most effective way. Some information may be distributed through impulse lectures, webinars, or professional excursions. The consolidated knowledge is compiled in a once-a-year updated catalogue which is periodically provided to the regional Institutes of Rural Education and Training, which then decide which content they wish to offer for farmers.

This approach ensures that the information remains neutral, independent, and adaptable to various educational formats but also regions and target groups. The Innovation Farm focuses strictly on compiling and structuring practical insights from tested technologies. Knowledge from each test is gathered in thematic groups, with no individual product, device or company being advertised. This separation of roles and focuses reinforce the project's commitment to unbiased knowledge dissemination and avoids overlap with training or promotional activities.

Monthly joint meetings are held to discuss new use cases for testing, which are selected through consensus rather than formal approval processes. Proposals for new testing can come from all sides, be it from industry, the Innovation Farm itself, or the funding body.

Examples of current use cases include:

- Arable farming

1. Digital tools for soil zoning, tillage, seedbed preparation, and sowing.
2. Precise plant protection and variable fertilization, Robotics & AI.

- Grassland management

1. Site-specific grassland reseeding, Technologies to optimize the grassland process chain

- Lifestock systems

1. Digital herd management.
2. Digital animal recognition systems and surveillance sensors.
3. Automation and robotics in the barn

- Viticulture & fruit farming

1. Robotics in viticulture.
2. Drones application in fruit farming.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR REPLICABILITY

- A clear framework is essential to delineate the scope – focusing strictly on market-ready technologies.
- Successful implementation requires institutions with experience in agricultural trials and access to relevant infrastructure, including machinery and livestock.
- Staff must be capable of managing complex testing procedures.
- Coordination among diverse actors and flexible decision-making structures are key.
- Challenges include securing sustainable funding beyond project subsidies and managing the high resource demands of running many use cases at same time.

BENEFITS

- Enhances AKIS functionality by consolidating expertise and facilitating knowledge transfer across regions and institutions.
- Improves coordination among actors and supports the dissemination of validated, practical information.
- For farmers: provides accesss to independent evaluations of new technologies.
- For advisory services: expands the portfolio of educational offerings.
- For managing authorities: contributes to CAP indicators related to modernization and digitalization.
- Promotes environmentally beneficial technologies, accelerating their adoption in practice.

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

• Innovation Farm - Technologien und Entwicklungen in der Landwirtschaft.

Austria

METK (ÜhendPIP project manager:
Hanna Tamsalu
hanna.tamsalu@metk.agri.ee

Project leader Innovation Farm:
Dr. Markus Gansberger
markus.gansberger@josephinum.at

modernAKIS Together for Systems' Innovation

Training, knowledge exchange and information

AKIS-in-Practice!3.22

Building Regenerative Farms through Peer Mentoring Programmes in France

Keywords/Tags

- New Entrants
- Peer-to-peer Learning,
- Coaching
- Knowledge Exchange

Potential users

- Managing Authorities
- AKIS Coordination Bodies
- Innovation support services
- Advisory services providers

RATIONALE

The agricultural sector faces significant challenges, notably generational renewal and the transition towards sustainable, regenerative practices. New entrants often lack the practical, diversified experience necessary to establish viable farms that ensure a stable income. The traditional linear model of knowledge transfer (research to advisory to farmer) often fails to capture the practical, real-world, and highly contextualized knowledge gained by innovative new farmers. There is a clear need for an interactive, peer-to-peer learning approach to transfer practical knowledge, build confidence, and foster a new generation of diversified, resilient farmers.

SOLUTION

The solution is the establishment of a **mentoring programme for farmers** focusing on **organic regenerative farming** with **short supply chains.** This approach directly addresses the knowledge gap faced by new entrants and peers wishing to upskill by providing **experiential and practical training.** The core of the solution is structured peer-to-peer learning and mentorship, leveraging the host farmers' journey from non-farming professionals to successful, diversified producers of vegetables, fruit, and laying hens. This diversification is key to demonstrating how new entrants can achieve smooth and stable incomes. Initially financed under CasDAR (Special Allocation Account for Agricultural and Rural Development), the programme is now supported by EU funds.

IN PRACTICE

The **mentoring programme for farmers** supports new entrants who wish to join a C**ommunity-Supported Agriculture (CSA)** network. Within this model, farmers and consumers establish a direct partnership based on mutual commitment and shared risk, ensuring a stable income for producers and transparent, locally sourced food for consumers. New entrants often lack the practical experience required to operate within such collaborative systems, making peer mentoring an essential tool for integration and success.
Each new farmer is paired with an experienced **mentor farmer** producing similar products. Mentorship is voluntary, yet mentors are carefully selected based on both their technical expertise and communication skills, ensuring they can effectively guide and motivate their peers.

The mentoring process is structured in three main phases:
Phase 1 – On-farm mentoring visit:
The mentor visits the new entrant's farm to understand its context, production system, and specific needs. A standardized questionnaire helps structure the discussion, focusing on production methods, marketing strategies, and organizational aspects related to CSA membership.

Phase 2 – Reciprocal visit:
The new entrant then visits the mentor's farm to observe concrete examples of CSA operations—crop diversification, logistics, consumer engagement, and cooperative management—fostering hands-on learning and exchange.

Phase 3 – Follow-up support:
After the visits, the mentor remains available for follow-up sessions (in person or by phone) to address practical questions that arise during implementation and the first CSA campaign.
Mentors receive compensation for their time and expertise, including travel costs and post-visit consultations. For instance, in France mentoring visits are reimbursed at **€41.14/hour (VAT included)**, covering both the initial call and the on-farm visit. Travel allowances depend on distance (approximately **€48–65** per round trip), and two follow-up calls (around one hour each) are also compensated **(€82.28 VAT included).**
Rather than creating competition, the mentoring process fosters mutual support among farmers. Since local demand for CSA products remains strong, participants often identify complementary opportunities instead of rivalry—developing shared logistics, crop planning, or customer engagement strategies. This cooperative dynamic reinforces local food systems and enhances the overall resilience of CSA networks.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR REPLICABILITY

The success of the mentoring programme relies on a combination of organisational, relational, and practical factors that ensure the continuity and effectiveness of peer learning. The following elements have proven particularly important in supporting trust-based relationships, facilitating knowledge transfer, and fostering long-term collaboration between farmers:

- **Structured tools:** standardized questionnaires and checklists support consistent and targeted mentoring.
- **Dedicated coordination:** a local coordinator (ideally one per production sector) ensures good matching between mentors and mentees.
- **Trust and openness:** mutual confidence is essential for honest exchange and long-term cooperation.
- **Transparent compensation:** clear, modest remuneration helps ensure fairness and continuity without distorting motivation.
- **CSA network integration:** embedding the mentoring system within existing CSA networks facilitates community building and long-term sustainability.

BENEFITS

- **Accelerated integration:** new entrants gain immediate access to CSA know-how, reducing start-up errors.
- Peer learning culture: farmers strengthen networks of mutual support and knowledge exchange.
- **Economic stability**: participation in CSA schemes secures predictable income streams and fosters diversified production.
- **Social cohesion:** direct relationships between producers and consumers reinforce trust and community resilience.
- **Scalability:** the model can be replicated in other regions with similar CSA or short-supply-chain dynamics, requiring minimal adaptation.

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

• AMAP website: https://www.lesamapdeprovence.org/.

Francia

@

Service de remplacement des Alpes Maritimes:
Agnès Fiamma Papone
Ferme Lavancia

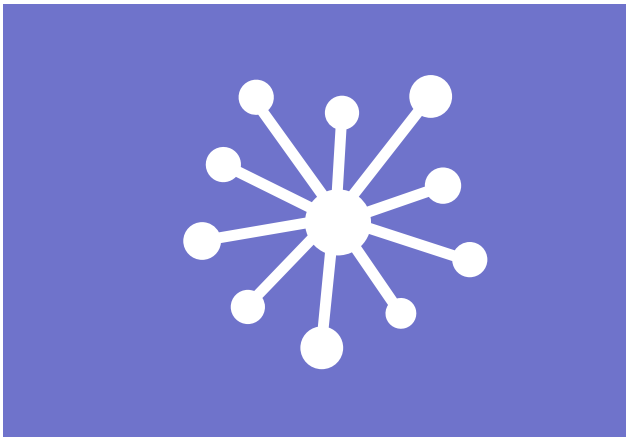
modernAKIS Together for Systems' Innovation

Theme 4

CAP networks

Keywords/Tags

- Governance
- Networking
- Knowledge sharing
- CAP network
- Interaction



RATIONALE

The AKIS perspective emphasizes the knowledge flows and diffusion based on exchange within heterogeneous and multi-stakeholder contexts, networks or platforms. This can lead to increasing access to knowledge, learning by interacting and by using it until innovation development. Besides, it is recognized that multistakeholder networks are fundamental levers of spreading and scaling of innovations processes along the agricultural sector and rural areas as they are likely to influence individual behaviours and practices towards social and technological change.

On this regard, multi stakeholder networks that effectively pursued knowledge exchange and spread of innovations have shown some common successful factors.

First, the bigger it is the size of the network, in terms of both numerosity and typologies of AKIS actors, the better is the outreach of its influence and effects on system change and transformation. This derives mostly from the potential of boosting a wider interconnectivity, by enabling the environment to start new and/or to consolidate interactions, and likely by including hard-to-reach people.

Second factor of success is the multitude of knowledge and innovations to share that networks can effectively help to emerge through empowering actors to deploy and recombine the different types of tacit and codified knowledge. So, that this should enable AKIS actors accessing, exchange and develop knowledge and practices to build upon leading to innovations.

Thirdly there's the regularity and continuity over time of stakeholders' inclusion in participatory engagement activities. These can lead maturing a wider sense of belonging to the system and trust among each other, that is fundamental to reinforce the potential of the network to enable the environment for knowledge exchange and to foster influence and emulation of experiences among stakeholders.

Consequently, continuity in funding schemes for networking activities is necessary.

All in all, the more the actors within the AKIS are well-interconnected and interact, the more effectively the knowledge is disseminated. In fact, innovation and change can be realised, as in any systemic approach, by networking processes which resources are mobilised and knowledge flows from different sources are channelled and used (Cristiano et al, 2023; D1.1; Annex 2).

To this effect, networking organization and action has become to all intents and purposes a matter of institutional functioning and embedding.

Box 1: Brief overview on European and National Rural Networks under CAP policye

Building on the experience of LEADER networks (2000-2006), under the EU regulatory framework, National rural networks (NRNs) group administrations and organisations involved in rural development (art. 68 Reg. CE 1698/2005; art. 54 Reg. CE 1303/2013) and have been introduced since EU rural development policy 2007-2013 with the aim to support policies for the development of agricultural areas in a way that fosters exchanges of experience and knowledge between practitioners, institutions and all those who live and work in rural areas. In particular, in the programming period 2014-2022, networking by the National Rural Networks aimed to: (a) increase the involvement of stakeholders in the implementation of rural development; (b) improve the quality of implementation of rural development programmes; (c) inform the broader public and potential beneficiaries on rural development policy and funding opportunities; (d) foster innovation in agriculture, food production, forestry and rural areas. Besides, the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) has been put in place (art. 67 Reg. CE 1698/2005; art. 52 Reg. CE 1303/2013) for the networking of national networks, organisations and administrations active in the field of rural development. Still at EU level, together with the ENRD, two additional networks/networking units were established: i) **the European Evaluation Helpdesk** having the purpose to ensure the effectiveness of CAP evaluations by specifically assisting managing authorities, national CAP networks, paying agencies, evaluators and the European Commission. It also analyses the implementation of CAP interventions by EU Member States and disseminates useful monitoring and evaluation practices among the EU CAP Network; ii) the **EIP-Agri Support Facility for Innovation and Knowledge exchange** (yet EIP-Agri network) which role is to facilitate cooperation between those with a keen interest in sharing knowledge and innovative ideas for sustainable agriculture, forestry and rural areas.

The action plan of the NRN should have included at least the following activities (art. 54 Reg. CE 1303/2013): (i) the collection of examples of projects covering all priorities of the rural development programmes; (ii) the facilitation of thematic and analytical exchanges between rural development stakeholders, sharing and dissemination of findings; (iii) the provision of training and networking for local action groups and in particular technical assistance for inter-territorial and transnational co-operation, facilitation of co-operation among local action groups and the search of partners for the measure referred to "Co-operation"; (iv) the provision of networking for advisors and innovation support services; (v) the sharing and dissemination of monitoring and evaluation findings; (vi) a communication plan including publicity and information concerning the rural development programme in agreement with the Managing Authorities and information and communication activities aimed at a broader public; (vii) the participation in and contribution to the European network for rural development.

In fact, for the CAP programming period 2023-2027, networks as recognized by regulation (art. 126 UE Reg 2115/2021) as key tools to drive and steer policy and to promote stakeholder engagement, knowledge sharing and capacity building for Member States and other actors.

On this regard, each Member State is called to establish a CAP network at national level **(National networks directory)** for the networking of organisations and administrations, advisors, researchers and other innovation actors in the field of agriculture and rural development.

Networking through the national CAP networks shall have the following objectives: (a) increase the involvement of all relevant stakeholders in the implementation of CAP Strategic Plans and, where relevant, in their design; (b) accompany the Member States' administrations in the implementation of CAP Strategic Plans and the transition to a performance-based delivery model; (c) contribute to improving the quality of implementation of CAP Strategic Plans; (d) contribute to the information of the public and potential beneficiaries on the CAP and funding opportunities; (e) foster innovation in agriculture and rural development and support peer-to-peer learning and the inclusion of, and the interaction between, all stakeholders in the knowledge-exchange and knowledge-building process; (f) contribute to monitoring and evaluation capacity and activities; (g) contribute to the dissemination of CAP Strategic Plans results.

The functions of the CAP National Networks in achieving the above-mentioned objectives encompass:

- Collection, analysis and dissemination of information on actions and good practices implemented or supported under CAP Strategic Plans as well as analysis on developments in agriculture and rural areas.
- Contribution to capacity building for Member States administrations and of other actors involved in the implementation of CAP Strategic Plans, including as regards monitoring and evaluation processes.
- Creation of platforms, fora and events to facilitate exchanges of experience between stakeholders and peer-to-peer learning, including where relevant exchanges with networks in third countries.
- Collection of information and facilitation of its dissemination as well as networking of funded structures and projects, such as local action groups, EIP operational groups and equivalent structures and projects.
- Support for cooperation projects between EIP operational groups, local action groups or similar local development structures, including transnational cooperation.
- Creation of links to other Union-funded strategies or networks.
- Contribution to the further development of the CAP and preparation of any subsequent CAP Strategic Plan period.
- Dissemination of the summary of the plans of the EIP OGs and of the results of their projects.
- Participating in, and contributing to, the activities of the European CAP network.

With respect to support the AKIS strengthening, CAP networks, through their National Supports Units (NSUs) for innovation networking, can help to smooth innovation and knowledge exchange concerning all 9 CAP objectives by bringing together all the resources they can access through the OGs, Horizon 2020 multi-actor projects, the EIP website and new knowledge reservoirs. Linking all these sources of information provides a wealth of material for local AKIS actors.

In this view, the NSUs have the task of supporting both (a) the strengthening of national agricultural knowledge and innovation systems (AKIS) and (b) the development of links with research and innovation policy under Horizon Europe and other national instruments.

This role is feasible because Rural Networks already worked in synergy with a variety of actors (farming organisations, LAGs and their associations, rural NGOs, educational and research institutions, business clusters, etc.), linking them to the practical implementation of rural development policies and promoting information exchange between the EU, national and local levels, thus facilitating the development of existing potential and strengthens capacity building.

Interestingly, from a consultation of the former NRNs 2014-2020 that was conducted by European CAP network during July-September 2022 it came out that all the CAP Networks 2023-2027 aim to involve AKIS stakeholders in view to address the need to support innovation in agriculture and rural areas. In fact, in 27 out of 28 cases the Exchange knowledge and networking with AKIS stakeholders is a priority of the CAP networks, while the Support innovation in agriculture via EIP-AGRI Operational Groups is set 19 of the cases **(Network mapping surveys, 2023)**.

Eventually, it is worth to consider that specific independent evaluations of CAP networks can be put in place by the managing authorities of the CAP strategic plans in view to support, preferably on on-going basis, timely melioration of the specific functions of promoting knowledge exchange, of enabling and spreading innovations, and of supporting the increase of system capacities of AKIS actors. On this regard, some evaluations of CAP networks implemented already in previous CAP programming periods can be inspirational to draw lessons on how to better configure their role, organization and functions and on how to adequately plan utilization focused evaluations **(Evaluation Helpdesk).**

Box 2: European CAP Network 2023-2027

A fundamental point of reference for CAP networks is the European CAP Network (yet ERDN - European Rural Development Network) which since the 2007-2013 programming period has performed functions of guidance, sharing of experiences and knowledge among Member States, analyses, tools, and capacity building activities. The Network is a forum through which National CAP Networks, organisations, administrations, researchers, entrepreneurs and practitioners can share knowledge and information (e.g. via peer-to-peer learning and good practices) about agriculture and rural policy (CAP Network website). The EU CAP Network has been set up by the European Commission in line with the European Regulation to support the achievement and implementation of specific objectives of the new EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), while optimising the flow of information about agriculture and rural policy within the EU (CAP Network website). The current CAP network 2023-2027 includes the previous European Network for Rural Development, the Evaluation Helpdesk and EIP-AGRI network by which it supports design and implementation of CAP strategic plans, innovation and knowledge exchange, including EIP-AGRI, and evaluation and monitoring of the CAP.

Box 3: European CAP Network 2023-2027

During the meeting of 23rd NRN meeting held on 20 and 21 September 2022, some ideas on CAP networks' role in strengthening innovation support emerged from the discussion among the 66 participants, as it follows.

The National Supports Units - of the national CAP Networks (hereby NSUs) - can help by providing "innovation networking", by bringing people together in groups, for instance by organising opportunities such as targeted events (online/in-person), study groups and workshops, which help interaction. These activities provide occasions for farmers to engage effectively with a diverse range of organisations within the AKIS, including with their peers, advisors, researchers, and others who may help generate ideas for EIP Operational group projects, thanks to the cross-fertilisation among the participants. Other opportunities lie in the provision of opportunities for farm businesses to tell their stories, the "innovation ambassadors", and to open their farms to others, including to their peers. Competitions can provide opportunities to socialise and celebrate the achievements of farm businesses and others in the innovation space. All this is very useful to create an innovation-attentive environment and supports the AKIS innovation ecosystem. Furthermore, the development and promotion of a digital Platform (innovation ideas hub) on the CAP NSU webpage for capturing ideas could be envisaged. A platform may take many forms, e.g. a portal where ideas can be submitted and displayed, and/or a vehicle to connect and share ideas between parties. The generation of innovative ideas may not come naturally to individuals: an experienced and supportive listener is often essential. The development of innovative ideas therefore often relies on advisers or innovation brokers, who analyse and help define the idea after capturing it. There may be significant opportunities for NSUs to work closely with such partners to further enhance opportunities around innovation support & networking.

Highlights Report of the 23rd NRN meeting

Synthesis of session on CAP networks & innovation – Lessons from the 23rd NRN Meeting

FIRST INSIGHTS FROM PRACTICES

The practices presented in this "Compendium" provide an overview on some functions that CAP networks can play in MSs, that beyond the EU regulatory requirements, shed the light on the value of centralized, user-friendly platforms in fostering collaboration, enhancing data accessibility, and supporting informed decision-making within the agricultural sector. Particularly, they reveal several key similarities and insights:

- Strengthening transnational knowledge exchange: Especially the practice from the Nordic-Baltic countries — the Network to Innovate webinar series — highlighted how cross-country and cross-sectoral collaboration enhances the diffusion of agricultural innovations, linking actors from research, advisory services, and education.
- Learning through practice: Whether via peer-to-peer webinars or vocational training modules, both initiatives emphasize experiential learning — transferring not only results but also the process of innovation, encouraging reflection and problem-solving skills.
- Effective use of Digital tools: Online platforms, webinars, and digital resources (videos, databases, posters) prove essential for accessibility, scalability, and maintaining engagement across borders.
- Capacity Building and Skill Development: Each practice fosters capacity building — for farmers, advisors, and students — by integrating interactive formats and real-world examples that promote innovation literacy and critical thinking.
- Collaboration and trust as enablers: The success of both initiatives relies on building trust, defining clear roles, and fostering continuous cooperation among partners, ensuring the long-term sustainability of transnational learning networks.
- Replicability through structured yet flexible fesign: The modular and thematic design of both the webinar series and training programs allows adaptation to different national contexts, making them transferable and sustainable learning models within the EU AKIS framework.

FOOD FOR THINKING

In this perspective, we could raise some questions (not exhaustive) to help us reflecting and co-building new solutions on:

- How to set up AKIS knowledge platforms and ensure prompt update of information?
- How to set up adequate standards and procedure for good quality data and information to share?
- How to engage knowledge providers in deliver on-time data and information?
- How to develop an action plan for the NSUs?
- How many resources, which competencies and which governance for the NSUs?
- Which and how many stakeholders should be involved in networking activities and how to assess their actual connectivity? How to take advantage of the potential of some stakeholders to increase trust and interactions within the AKIS?

- What is it meant by knowledge flows, exchange and circulation?
- What is it meant by networking activities? what do they include, and which methodologies and tools can be applied?
- How to ensure continuity in participatory activities and funding?
- How to better develop synergic interconnectivity between modernAKIS network and EU/National CAP networks to benefit from differences and complementarities?
- How to differentiate networking activities of modernAKIS and the CAP Networks?
- What is the relation between the networking activities and the Community of Practices (CoPs) in modernAKIS?
- Which selection criteria, procedures, templates and timing for collecting relevant knowledge and innovations' materials to feed repositories/databases/digital networking platforms?
- How to promote transnational cooperation and peer-to-peer learning to foster innovation uptake across countries and sectors?
- Which mechanisms can help transfer lessons learned from one context or Member State to another in a structured and replicable way?

HOW TO FOLLOW-UP WITH THE RESULTS OF COLLECTION OF AKIS-IN-PRACTICE!

The overview on roles and functions of networks and the observation of the practices of CAP networks brings some reflections on the needs for capacity building and networking activities that can be certainly considered in modernAKIS:

- Inclusion of CAP networks in modernAKIS network that can enable taking advantage of the wider perspective and basin of.
- Joint development of material and organization of meetings with CAP networks.
- Follow -ups of activities and results through dissemination among the CAP networks and modernAKIS respective networks.
- CoPs events focused on CAP Networks.
- Compendium of methodologies and practices of multi-stakeholder networks.
- Systematization of results of evaluations on NRNs activities, good/bad practices supporting knowledge exchange and innovation.

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- ADE S.A CCRI, OIR (2022), Study on the ENRD and the NRNs' contribution to the implementation of EU Rural Development policy - Final Report (Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development - December 2022)
- EU SCAR AKIS (2019), Preparing for Future AKIS in Europe. Brussels, European Commission.
- European Commission – Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development – Unit E.4 (2016): Guidelines Evaluation of National Rural Networks 2014-2020. Brussels
- RESR (2016), Connettere l'Europa rurale 2014-2020, ISBN 978-92-79-55135-2, febbraio 2016 https://ec.europa.eu/enrd/sites/enrd/files/publi-enrd-booklet-2016-it.pdf

modernAKIS Together for Systems' Innovation

CAP networks

AKIS-in-Practice! 4.5

Network to Innovate: Transnational AKIS Cooperation through Thematic Webinars

Keywords/Tags

- Peer-to-peer learning
- Operational Group
- Transnational cooperation
- CAP Network

Potential users

- AKIS coordination bodies
- Managing authorities of the CAP strategic Plans
- Advisors and Innovation Support Services
- EIP Agri Operational Groups
- CAP networks

RATIONALE

Effective innovation and knowledge transfer are central pillars of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) Strategic Plans, driven by the transversal objective of fostering robust Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS). A critical challenge for the European agricultural sector is ensuring up-to-date research, development, and knowledge flows efficiently across all segments of the value chain: producers, processors, advisors, and researchers. The traditional, fragmented approach often impedes the rapid and widespread adoption of solutions.

To overcome this, there is a clear need to strengthen transnational cooperation and peer-to-peer exchange across geographical and institutional boundaries.

SOLUTION

The **"Network to Innovate"** webinar series serves as a crucial platform for promoting innovation and fostering collaboration within the European agricultural sector, particularly among Nordic-Baltic countries.
The series acts as a joint undertaking by CAP networks from the Nordic-Baltic region to achieve effective cooperation between producers, processors, advisors, and researchers. It aims to transfer up-to-date research and knowledge, support innovation activities that connect various actors (like innovation clusters), and enhance the rapid and widespread practical application of innovative solutions through international collaboration.

Network to Innovate: Rural Readiness – How Communities can be Prepared and Resilient

Network to innovate: Nordic-Baltic EIP-AGRI Brokerage & Networking Event

Network to innovate: Info and Brokerage Event for Transnational EIP-AGRI Operational Groups

The workshops cover a wide array of topics, from smart farming and renewable energy to crop biodiversity and animal welfare, demonstrating a commitment to addressing contemporary agricultural challenges through shared expertise and innovative solutions.

The initiative began in 2019, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, which severely disrupted traditional in-person networking events, workshops, and seminars organized by the CAP Network. The initial plan was to host a large, two-day international conference to physically showcase innovative solutions and facilitate networking, aiming to foster preliminary agreements for future initiatives. However, the pandemic necessitated a shift to a virtual format, leading to the first online launch event on August 26, 2021.

Following the initial virtual launch, feedback indicated a strong desire to continue the events but also a need for shorter, more focused sessions, as the original 6.5-hour online format was found to be too intensive. This direct feedback led to the decision to transition to thematic workshops, each lasting 1.5 hours and featuring innovation solutions from initially three, then four (Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Poland) Nordic-Baltic countries.

The webinars focus on solutions that meet the practical needs of entrepreneurs and agricultural stakeholders, improving farmers' business management skills and profitability by leveraging data resources efficiently and keeping them informed about emerging developments in the sector.

IN PRACTICE

Initially, the thematic workshops featured innovation solutions from Finland, Estonia, and Latvia. Poland later joined, expanding the initiative to four participating countries.

Every event features at least three presentations, one from each participating country. The primary goal is to promote EIP-AGRI Operational Group projects, but the series also actively encourages showcasing innovation actions related to CAP, LEADER, Horizon Europe, and other funding sources.

The focus goes beyond just what was achieved; participants also explore how the innovation process unfolded. In addition to discussing project aims and outcomes, presenters are always asked to share their project management strategies and lessons learned that could benefit future initiatives. This focus on "the how" ensures valuable knowledge transfer for new project development.

To manage these complexities, the organisation team shared responsibilities from the early stages, with each partner country being responsible for organizing a specific workshop in a given "season" (e.g., Finland for September, Estonia for October, Latvia for November).

The working language of the workshop is English. To overcome possible language barriers, each presenter is approached and supported by their own national CAP network specialist.

Managing technical platforms (like Zoom or Padlet) across different countries with varying privacy policies and official allowances has also been a practical challenge. During the first webinars, a detailed script was introduced, as done by the EIP-AGRI Service Point, to not forget important details and to manage responsibilities.

The team of organisers have joint WhatsApp group, that is used also outside of the organisation of the webinars to support each other regarding various questions about innovation cooperation and EIP-Agri landscape.

The events (presentations) are recorded and uploaded to YouTube, significantly increasing their reach beyond the live participants. As of late 2023, over 800 people registered for the live Zoom sessions, while YouTube viewers exceeded 2,000. The format of an informative “coffe-break” and free discussion among Nordic-Baltic facilitators is a result of long-term commitment and trust. Although the discussions after the presentations is not recorded, there is a possibility to look through the Q&A and ask your own. During the workshop, all questions are collected in written format in Padlet. No question remains unanswered: if it was not possible to answer during the webinar, it will at least be presented in the Padlet.

The team is continuously learning and improving their promotion strategies, aiming to harmonize dissemination plans across partners to ensure more consistent participation. A special landing page for the "Network to Innovate" has been updated to serve as a central information hub.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR REPLICABILITY

The organizing team views the process as "lifelong learning," continuously evaluating activities and using lessons learned to adapt and improve, demonstrating a commitment to enhancing the effectiveness of the series.

The practical implications for replicability within the "Network to Innovate" series and the projects discussed can be drawn from various operational strategies, collaboration approaches, and lessons learned:

Clear roles and responsibilities: Establishing a core team with defined responsibilities, where each partner country organizes specific workshops, allows for efficient management of international collaboration despite challenges like cultural differences and language barriers.

Adaptive and flexible approach: The shift from a full-day online event to shorter, thematic workshops based on participant feedback demonstrates an adaptable model that can be replicated and refined. Continuous evaluation and immediate application of lessons learned ("lifelong learning") are crucial for improvement.

- Structured planning and documentation: Developing clear frameworks for events and processes, allows for consistent replication of activities. Documenting agreements in separate files, rather than within meeting minutes, is a practical tip for easier access and reference.
- Pre-analysed materials for meetings: Preparing materials in advance for meetings ensures time is used valuably and discussions are more effective. This strong leadership approach promotes engagement and trust among members.
- Identifying and engaging relevant partners: Projects actively sought partners based on their real interest and specific expertise, including academic institutions, private companies, and farmers. This helps ensure the necessary skill sets are present and that solutions meet practical needs.
- Building trust and personal connections: Emphasizing trust among partners and fostering personal connections from the outset helps build strong teams, especially in international contexts. Informal interactions and "human partnership" are key to long-lasting successful collaborations.
- Documenting both successes and failures: It's important to share and document not only successful outcomes but also mistakes and challenges encountered. This "catalogue of good and bad practices" prevents others from repeating the same errors and fosters a learning environment.
- Cross-border cooperation: Mandatory cross-border partnerships in funding calls can push initiatives forward and help smaller countries lead innovative efforts, as seen with the Estonian Dairy Cluster. Identifying rare but similar interests across borders helps establish successful joint topics.
- Multi-channel communication: Utilizing a variety of channels, including social media (Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube), dedicated websites, and articles in online newspapers, significantly increases reach and ensures information is accessible to diverse audiences.
- Looking ahead, the initiative aims to build on its experience by harmonizing calls for transnational cooperation and exploring new formats, such as online "coffee breaks" for new operational groups or thematic workshops targeting young scientists, to further inspire and connect innovators in the agricultural sector.



BENEFITS

- **Accelerated Knowledge Dissemination:** A primary goal is to widely disseminate innovative examples and project solutions—not only within the Nordic-Baltic region but also to other European countries and the European Commission. This showcases practices in key areas like biosensors, smart farming, waste management, farm data, and others.
- **Enhanced AKIS Efficiency:** Leveraging the expertise within the broader EIP community and encouraging direct contact between projects helps to prevent redundant research and accelerate development.
- Practical and Digestible Solutions: The workshops present concrete innovation solutions that directly address the practical needs of entrepreneurs. The goal is to make information "easily digestible" and understandable, moving beyond purely scientific language.
- **Improved Information Flow:** The initiative strives to improve the flow of new information from research institutes, universities, and advisory sectors.
- **Learning from Experience:** By collecting and documenting both successes and failures, the series helps others avoid repeating mistakes, contributing to a valuable "catalogue of good and bad practices".
- **Fostered Transnational Cooperation:** The series facilitates networking activities and encourages the formation of preliminary agreements for future innovative initiatives. It encourages transnational cooperation, allowing for the adoption of existing innovative solutions from other countries.
- **Empowerment of Farmers:** It provides farmers with knowledge, skills, and results that they might not have obtained otherwise, supporting the conversion of data into practical products and services.
- **Concise Overview:** Participants gain a very good overview of innovation practices in various sectors during the concise 1.5-hour thematic workshops.

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

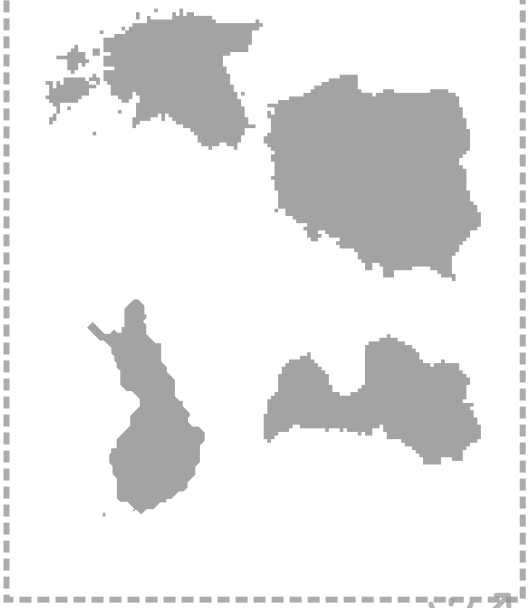
- Network to Innovate website: https://metk.agri.ee/en/network-innovate
- Online workshop “Strenght in numbers” – Network to innovate: https://youtu.be/dUEUVQakTBw?list=TLGG0TQue2aOKGUwMjA4MjAyNQ

Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Poland

Estonian CAP Nerwork:
Konstantin Mihhejev, Maaelu Teadmuskeskus
konstantin.mihhejev@metk.agri.ee

Finnish CAP Network:
Tuija Kallio
tuija.kallio@ruokavirasto.fi

METK:
Hanna Tamsalu
hanna.tamsalu@metk.agri.ee



modernAKIS Together for Systems' Innovation

CAP networks

AKIS-in-Practice! 4.6

Shaping the future of young farmers, successors and advisors through EIP-Agri innovations: training program at agricultural schools

Keywords/Tags

- Innovation
- Agricultural education
- EIP-Agri Operational Groups
- CAP Network
- Entrepreneurship

Potential users

- Vocational and technical schoolteachers in agriculture
- Agricultural advisory services and extensionists
- EIP-Agri Operational Groups
- Students of agricultural schools
- CAP networks
- Managing authorities and AKIS coordination bodies

RATIONALE

Agricultural innovation is critical for sustainability, competitiveness, and resilience in the face of climate and market challenges. The European Innovation Partnership (EIP-Agri) has generated thousands of innovations through Operational Groups (OGs), creating a unique knowledge base for transforming farming practices. However, a major risk persists: these innovations often remain siloed within individual farms, failing to become shared assets for future generations of farmers, advisors, and policy implementers. This gap limits the systemic impact of EU investments in innovation.

Source: Bavarian State Ministry of Foood, Agricolture and Forestry website.

While the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) does not finance formal school education, capacity building for farmers and advisors is supported under the CAP Strategic Plans through vocational training and other forms of knowledge exchange within agricultural systems.
At the same time, the CAP funds CAP Networks, whose mandate includes dissemination and knowledge exchange, acting as a bridge between agricultural innovation and civil society. Leveraging these networks to integrate EIP-Agri outputs into vocational curricula offers a strategic opportunity to embed innovation into education pathways.
By connecting real-world case studies with interactive learning, this approach ensures that students—future farmers, advisors, and public funders—gain practical insights into innovation processes. It transforms isolated success stories into shared knowledge, fostering a culture of co-creation and continuous improvement across the Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS).

SOLUTION

The solution was developed by Bavarian State Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Forestry, the Federal Information Centre for Agriculture (BZL) and the German CAP Network.
The program integrates EIP-Agri innovations into vocational training modules for agricultural schools, using real case studies to link theory with practice. Through discussion, individual work, and group reflection, students develop analytical and problem-solving skills while understanding how innovations are conceived, funded, and implemented. This interactive approach combines classroom learning with hands-on experiences such as workshops and field visits, supported by digital resources (videos, posters, project databases) and participatory methods like world cafés and group discussions. The result is a scalable, adaptable model that fosters practical understanding of innovation processes and prepares future farmers, advisors, and decision-makers for the challenges of modern agriculture.
By leveraging CAP Networks for dissemination, the initiative bridges the gap between agricultural innovation and education.

IN PRACTICE

The training program helps students **understand opportunities and challenges linked to agricultural innovation,** addressing both professional and personal aspects of change management. A key strength of the module is its **hands-on approach,** integrating real-world learning through the EU initiative **EIP-Agri (European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability).** By analyzing EIP-Agri case studies, students gain **first-hand experience of how innovations are conceived, funded, and implemented**, bridging classroom theory with practical application.

The programme follows a structured four-step learning path:

1. **Introduction:** Explore what innovation means in agriculture and why it matters.
2. **Analysis:** Examine real EIP-Agri cases using analysis sheets covering project goals, context, and impacts.
3. **Reflection:** Assess personal attitudes toward innovation and its role in future careers.
4. **Application:** Participate in workshops or field visits for direct interaction with innovation actors.

To enhance engagement, the module uses digital resources (videos, posters, EIP-Agri project database) and **participatory methods** such as group discussions, world cafés, and reflection circles. These tools make the approach **interactive, scalable, and adaptable across regions and languages**, ensuring practical replicability.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR REPLICABILITY

Primary implication is to include such type of knowledge sharing into the action plan of the CAP Network.

Other relevant implications are:

- Access to authentic resources: Real-world case studies and innovation actors (EIP-Agri database) are essential for credibility and relevance.
- Teacher engagement and skills: Strong facilitation abilities and willingness to integrate innovation topics into curricula are critical success factors.
- Collaborative material development: Capacity to co-create effective teaching resources that translate innovation results into accessible, practical content.
- Interactive and scalable tools: Use of analysis sheets, posters, digital resources, and participatory methods ensures adaptability across regions and languages.
- Cross-sector adaptability: The module can be replicated in vocational contexts beyond agriculture, wherever innovation and entrepreneurship are key learning outcomes.

BENEFITS

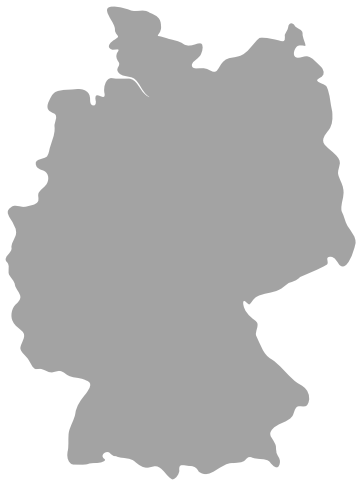
- **For students:** Strengthens analytical, communication, and innovation competencies, and encourage entrepreneurial thinking.
- **For teachers:** Offers a ready-to-use, interactive, and interdisciplinary teaching package.
- **For the agricultural sector:** Promotes a culture of innovation and collaborative problem-solving; fosters sustainability and competitiveness.
- **For rural areas:** Stimulates creative solutions for regional challenges and enhances knowledge exchange between practice and research.

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- Presentation and Brochure: Innovations: Implementing new ideas in the company | Education Server Agriculture.
- Training modules: Vocational Education and Training | Education Server Agriculture.
- Workshops: Bavarian State Ministry of Food, Agriculture, Forestry and Tourism

Germany – Bavaria

DVS - German Network for Rural Areas for the Common Agricultural Policy of the EU)
Dr. Leonie Goebel
leonie.goebel@ble.de



Watch this AKIS-in-Practice!

modernAKIS Together for Systems' Innovation

Theme 5
Back-office

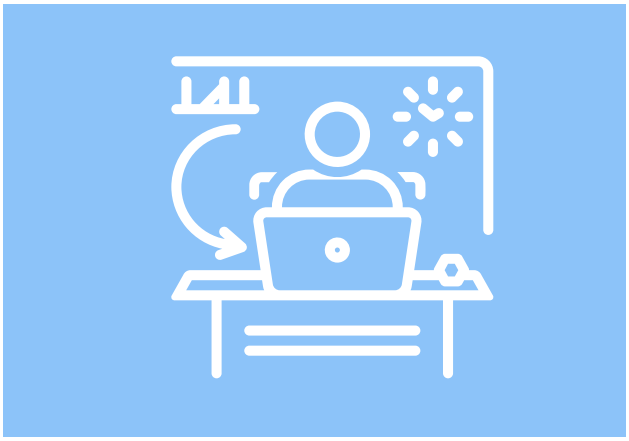
Keywords/Tags

Advisory

Training

Governance

Digitalisation



RATIONALE

What is the Back-office?

To support advisors in their job and integrate them within the AKIS, Reg. (CE) 2021/2115 introduces the “Back-office”.

The "back-office" consists of specialised support and up-to-date knowledge to be offered to “on-field” advisors to help them in having a holistic approach to farm decisions.

Modern advisory approaches should help connecting advisors with research and CAP networks and support them to deliver qualitative advice and innovation support. Such actions may fund as intervention under the Strategic CAP AKIS plans. They help at the same time the integration of advisors within the AKIS, the provision of quality advice through knowledge flows and bridging between science and practice, as well as the emergence of interactive innovation projects. However, taking on new roles required personal attitudes and a huge variety of competences and knowledge that, hardly, may be owned by a single individual.

The lack of strong back-office processes (e.g., no internal process support, no time allocated for developing skills in innovation, not enough contact with researchers and other AKIS actors, etc.) is one of the main bottlenecks when trying to strengthen the AKIS. In order to compete effectively with sales representatives, public or private impartial agricultural advisory services require professional back-office support to gather information on innovative technologies, modern management and application of new ICT technologies.

However, specific attention needs to be given also to involve private advisors in the services provided, taking into account that their linkages with research and CAP/EIP networks on innovative knowledge are, usually, quite limited. It can be very helpful that private advisors get full information on a number of priority practices linked with tackling societal challenges, such as integrated pest management, climate change, environment, reducing water use etc.

WHICH FUNCTIONS TO ENSURE AN EFFICIENT BACK-OFFICE SUPPORT?

The functions of the “back-office” are aimed at supporting on-field advisors with competencies, up-to-date knowledge and linkages with actors that are relevant to help solving complex problems, thus supporting innovation processes based on farmers’ demands and co-construction of solutions.

To provide this support, “back-office” need to ensure a high degree of connectivity in the AKIS system, in particular with researchers, advisors, H2020 Multi-Actor Projects and EIP- Agri Operational Groups bringing in innovative knowledge, but also with suppliers of inputs, other parts of the chain, with policy makers and with the broader society. This enables "back-office" to reply to specific questions asked by on-field advisors and to provide them with regular training on the latest knowledge.

Besides managing the necessary knowledge for front-office use, back-offices can actively build networking activities for various purposes (e.g., rural development networking, dedicated innovation platforms, "agro-food communities", etc.), allowing farmers and other stakeholders to meet and give a start to start-ups or innovative projects. Among these, back-offices should also help advisors in organising working groups (by linking research /advisory / SME / ecc.) to find a solution to a complex problem and, as a consequence, supporting the raise of EIP-Agri Operational Groups.

Moreover, the 'back-office' could also be assigned to data collection and sharing, thus creating economies of scale.

Based on the practice knowledge reservoirs (e.g., database of EIP Practice Abstracts, EU-FarmBook) and further input from the CAP/EIP networks with a focus on innovation, back-office may also develop a number of digital tools to be put at free disposal of advisors (for instance, a Whatsapp group service for advisors to help solving problems; from the field Q&A; databases with IPM solutions for crops; info on pest and disease levels; data for sound nutrient and pest management; etc.).

Due to the tasks to be accomplished, the “back-office” needs to be built in strong collaboration between all researchers and impartial advisors, as well as with existing farmers' groups, organisations and the national and regional CAP/EIP networks who have a focus on spreading knowledge and innovation, in particular capturing the innovative knowledge from EIP OGs and Horizon 2020 MA projects.

FIRST INSIGHTS FROM PRACTICES

The practice reported in this Compendium illustrates a regional-level governance model for the management of the Back Office, which operates under the direct coordination of the Puglia Region. The intervention benefits from a cooperation agreement among key territorial institutions — including universities, research centres, and regional agencies — ensuring a solid institutional framework, continuity, and neutrality in the delivery of services.

As in other regional cases, databases and digital tools form the backbone of the service, supporting data collection, analysis, and dissemination. However, the Puglia experience places particular emphasis on networking and the creation of virtual communities among AKIS actors — such as advisors, researchers, and innovation stakeholders — to foster continuous collaboration, peer learning, and exchange of good practices at regional, national, and European levels.

FOOD FOR THINKING

The back-office is a new intervention within the CAP, and it is interesting to see if and how it has been/will be implemented. Some questions:

- Have the functions of organisations already operating within advisory systems been expanded?
- Have new organisations been set up?
- Has a model in the form of a HUB been used (set up as a network of specialised and cross-sectoral expertise)?
- What functions have been/will be assigned? Are there the necessary skills to carry them out?
- Which digital tools and data governance models are most suitable for integrating the advisory services and innovation support services?

HOW TO FOLLOW-UP WITH THE RESULTS OF COLLECTION OF AKIS-IN-PRACTICE!

- Short description of the key features of the back-office in the different MSs in view to share information for knowledge and further interaction.
- Practice workshops, aimed at sharing practices, reflecting on experiences and effectiveness on the models applied to integrate advisors within the AKISs and promote grassroot innovation.

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 of the European Parliament and of the Council, art. 15 and art. 78
- EU SCAR AKIS (2019), Preparing for Future AKIS in Europe. Brussels, European Commission.

modernAKIS Together for Systems' Innovation

Back-office

AKIS-in-practice!5.3

Back Office in Puglia region (Italy)

Keywords/Tags

- Back office
- Advisory services
- Training

Potential users

- Managing Authorities
- Operational Groups
- Advisors
- Farmers
- Researchers
- Innovations support services providers

RATIONALE

The Puglia Region has developed a strong and diverse ecosystem of research centres, advisory services, and innovation projects driving agricultural development.

In recent years, numerous valuable initiatives – from EIP-AGRI Operational Groups to European and regional programmes – have generated significant knowledge and practical solutions. However, these experiences have also revealed the need for a more structured mechanism to connect, organise, and capitalise on the wealth of knowledge and innovation efforts already underway across the region.

Within the current programming period, Puglia has programmed seven AKIS-related interventions through its Rural Development Complementary Programme (RDCP), with a total allocation exceeding €44 million. This significant investment reflects the Region's commitment to consolidating its knowledge system and enhancing the effectiveness of innovation services in agriculture.

SOLUTION

To strengthen the regional governance of knowledge and innovation, the Puglia Region has established the AKIS Back Office as a Regional Competence Centre for the promotion and sharing of innovation and knowledge in agriculture.
Designed as the "operational arm" of the regional AKIS strategy, the Centre serves as the executive structure of the Regional AKIS Coordination Body and acts as the technical and organisational backbone of the entire system.
The Centre is conceived as a long-term strategic structure, ensuring the coordination, support, and dissemination of innovation and knowledge across the entire regional AKIS. By integrating projects, services, and information systems, it provides continuity beyond the current programming period and contributes to the long-term consolidation of the regional knowledge ecosystem.
Its centralised governance under regional leadership allows the Back Office to maximise synergies, outputs, and impacts. Specifically, it aims to:

- **Establish, strengthen, and integrate monitoring networks** for data collection and analysis (including laboratory activities), ensuring the systematic use of information generated through experimental actions and innovation projects.
- **Develop and make accessible regional, national, and international databases** to support advisors and other AKIS stakeholders in evidence-based decision-making.
- **Design and implement digital tools** enabling advanced data processing — such **as Decision Support Systems (DSS**) and **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** applications — to enhance innovation management and knowledge transfer.
- **Promote networking and virtual communities** among AKIS actors, particularly advisors, researchers, and the CAP Network, fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange at regional, national, and European levels.

The establishment and consolidation of a Regional AKIS Back Office in Puglia aim to overcome existing system weaknesses and deliver tangible competitive advantages for the region by:

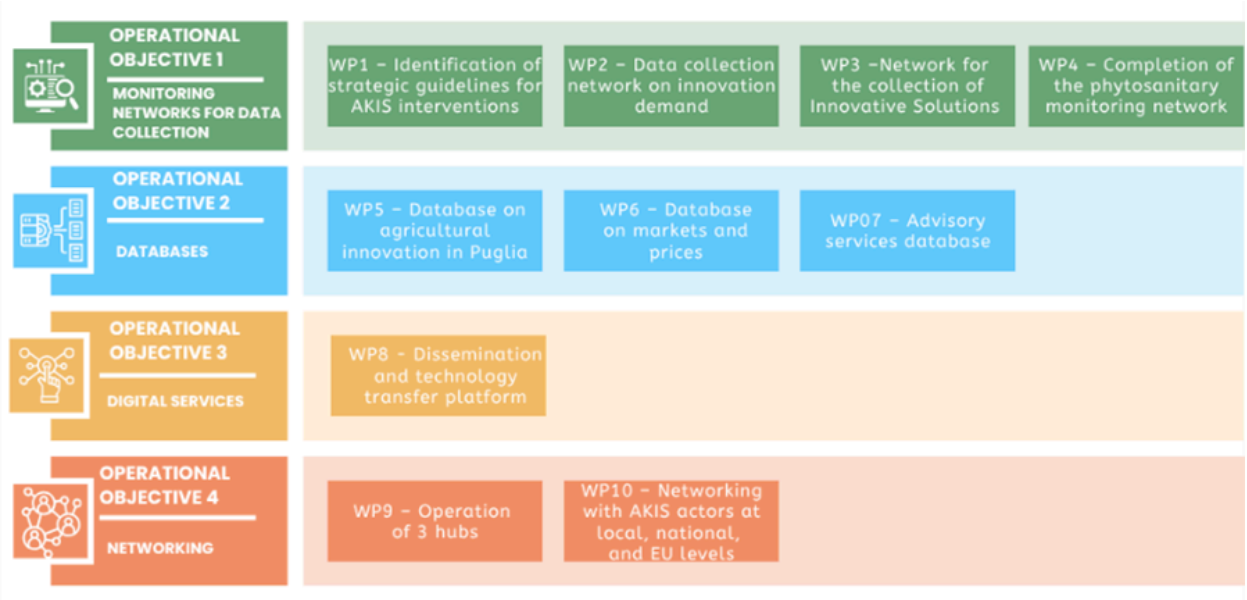
- providing information and specialised support to advisors and other AKIS actors;
- ensuring the active involvement of advisory services throughout the innovation process — from needs assessment to dissemination of results;
- strengthening the competences of AKIS stakeholders in innovation and knowledge transfer;
- encouraging the development of concrete solutions to address farms' innovation needs;
- improving the valorisation and dissemination of innovations achieved;
- organising and managing the system through strategic governance, enhancing efficiency and effectiveness, with the Puglia Region acting as leader and guarantor of results;
- maintaining constant links with key national public institutions, regional systems, and European initiatives, including the National Rural Network, the Interregional Network for Agricultural, Forestry, Aquaculture and Fisheries Research, and projects funded through other programmes such as PNRR (e.g. Agritech), Horizon Europe (AttractISS, ModernAKIS, EUFarmBook), and Interreg (Creative@Hubs).

To achieve these results, the intervention promotes a co-creation and collaborative approach among all AKIS actors, with a continuous focus on addressing the innovation needs of farms and rural enterprises.

IN PRACTICE

The Back Office AKIS intervention is directly managed by the Puglia Region through the Regional Department for Competitiveness of Agri-food Supply Chains, which holds specific competences in agricultural innovation.
The Department acts as a facilitator within the regional AKIS, ensuring the effective integration of diverse actors and the alignment of their activities. It operates with impartiality and without conflicts of interest, fostering a culture of cooperation among stakeholders and promoting their active participation in national and European networks.
In operational terms, the Regional AKIS Back Office is implemented through a cooperation agreement involving key public institutions — the Puglia Region (lead authority), the Universities of Bari "Aldo Moro", Foggia, and Salento, the CIHEAM Bari, and the Regional Agency for Irrigation and Forestry Activities (ARIF).
The implementation framework of the Back Office intervention consists of ten interrelated Work Packages (WPs), clustered under four Operational Results (ORs), all contributing to the overarching goal of strengthening coordination, knowledge sharing, and innovation flows within the regional AKIS in Puglia. Each partner is responsible for specific WPs under the overall coordination of the Department for Agriculture, Rural and Environmental Development of the Puglia Region.

Figure 1: Scheme of the Back-office intervention



Source: Elaborations on Regional Government Resolution No. 805 of 11 June 2025

The total amount of the budget dedicated to the intervention is €3,987,662.88.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR REPLICABILITY

Replicating the Puglia Back Office model requires adapting it to the regional AKIS and the administrative capacity in place:

- Assess the starting point: the model works best in regions with an established network of universities, advisory services and innovation actors already cooperating informally. Where these links are weak, an initial mapping and trust-building phase is essential.
- Define a manageable budget: even with limited funds, prioritise core functions — coordination team, digital databases, and minimal networking facilities — before expanding to broader activities.
- Use a cooperation agreement model: instead of competitive calls, formal partnerships among public institutions ensure speed, continuity and neutrality in managing shared tasks.
- Keep implementation modular: start with one or two thematic databases or pilot hubs, then scale gradually as governance and data quality improve.
- Ensure policy anchoring: embed the Back Office within the regional department's regular functions so it survives beyond the project cycle and becomes part of AKIS governance.
- Leverage existing EU experiences: connecting with other regional AKIS hubs or Interreg projects accelerates learning and avoids reinventing structures.

BENEFITS

- System integration: connects the entire chain from research to practice, overcoming fragmentation.
- Knowledge accessibility: digital databases and an open web platform make innovation outputs widely usable.
- Evidence-based governance: the Region can plan AKIS policies using real-time data and monitoring.
- Sustainability and scalability: built on existing infrastructures, ensuring continuity beyond project duration.
- Capacity building: strengthens skills of advisors, researchers and public officers through cooperation and training.
- Open innovation culture: promotes collaboration and knowledge reuse across regional and international networks.

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- Regional Government Resolution No. 805 of 11 June 2025 — from the Register of Regional Resolutions.
- Regional Government Resolution 30 December 2024, No. 1887.

Italy

@

Department for Agriculture, Rural Development and Environmental Development – Puglia Region:
Giovanni Di Fiore
g.difiore@regione.puglia.it

modernAKIS Together for Systems' Innovation

Theme 6

Integration of advisory services

Keywords/Tags

- Agricultural advisory services
- Integration
- AKIS

RATIONALE

Agricultural advisory services are essential for supporting farmers in managing productive processes, gathering their needs, sharing information, promoting new farming practices, and fostering collaboration among stakeholders toward the further development and the modernization of the sector. However, over the last two decades in the EU, the provision of agricultural services has faced several challenges, including a lack of closeness to farmers, misalignment between farmers' needs and the services provided, a lack of credibility/trust, and reluctance to pay for agricultural support services. Additionally, they lack up-to-date competencies and capacities to address the complexity and dynamics of contemporary AKIS.

In this regard, it is worth noting that modern agricultural systems exhibit a plurality of agricultural service providers, as well as various advisory approaches, methods, and tools for provision, along with new and diverse relational dynamics among advisors. The farmer is no longer the sole target of agricultural service provision but rather the final recipient of a series of knowledge flows and relational interactions that are necessary for delivering the service.

To cope with the weaknesses and challenges, advisory services have gained centrality under 2023-2027 CAP, where their competencies, roles and functions are emphasized as crucial for enabling its functioning and innovativeness in view of the modernization of the sector (Tab.1). In fact, the integration of advisory services within AKIS signifies a general strengthening of these services in terms of competencies and the ability to provide useful and necessary support to farmers. It also involves the reorganization of their relational dynamics within AKIS, including repositioning within and outside agricultural systems and interconnecting with all relevant actors who influence the quality and performance of consultancy services upstream and downstream of service provision.

The CAP therefore offers a broad range of support, from the establishment and reorganization of advisory structures to the enhancement of competencies, the promotion of networking and connections with relevant actors and innovation infrastructures, as well as fostering participation in innovation processes.

- In this respect, the CAP aims to empower advisory services to address the following key challenges:
- Better tailoring advice upon farmers' needs and opportunities.
- Addressing emerging needs, including innovation brokerage, modernization and digitalization, climate change and market-related issues.
- Adapting to diverse farmer profiles, including new entrants, part-time farmers, and those who are hard to reach.
- Expanding access to information through interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary cooperation, as well as the use of ICT tools.
- Bridging the gap with research and increase participation in research and innovation projects, in view to get on-time information and maintaining up-to-date competences.
- Acting as an intermediary between researchers and farmers by ensuring communication of farmers' needs back to the researchers and well-tailored innovative solutions.
- Engaging in a holistic approach to advice that connects technical guidance with farm profitability and market concerns while also pursuing specialized support.
- Connecting with international networks to access knowledge and advisors with specialized expertise when necessary.
- Participating more actively in the definition of policies and programs to inform decision-making, gain ownership, and ensure precise up-to-date and relevant competencies for supporting farmers in their implementation.
- Seeking insights from specialists within and out respective AKIS, including in other countries.

Table 1: Approaches to advisory

Objectives	Approach	Key components
Transfer of knowledge	Advisor tells farmer what to do	(1) The problem and the solutions are known, and (2) the farmers are willing and able to use the advice offered. The advice is standardized and focuses on individuals. The tools could include ICT, radio, television, newspapers, training, farm demonstrations, or some combination therein.
Support for decision making	Advisor gives farmer options	(1) The problem is known and various solutions are possible, depending on the situation of each farmer, and (2) the farmers are willing and able to use the advice offered. The advice is differentiated and focuses on individual situations. The tools could include computerized models and simulation tools.
Problem solving	Advisor supports learning processes to make farmers more autonomous	The problem and the solutions are complex and unknown. The diagnosis and the solutions are constructed by the farmers, who change their perception. The tools could include interactive training in the use of management tools.
Support local initiatives and solve conflict	Advisor facilitates innovation processes and supports negotiations between stakeholders	The problem and the solutions are complex and unknown, and involve various types of stakeholders. The tools could include shared diagnoses, project design by participants, and collective meetings.
Support to integration into supply chains, local and agri-food systems	Advisor helps organize or strengthen networks /support for niche innovation and scaling mechanisms stimulation	The problem and the solutions are complex and unknown, and involve various types of stakeholders. The tools could include shared diagnoses, project design by participants, facilitation/mediation tools and collective meetings.

Source. Our elaboration based on Faure et al., 2016

HOW TO INTEGRATE ADVISORY SERVICES?

Among the others some effective interventions might be the followings (list not exhaustive):

Cooperation for innovation

- Financial and professional incentives/awards for the engagement as partners in Operational Groups.
- Simplification of bureaucracy for accessing and reporting participation.
- Running the realization of cross visits between Operational Groups to allow peer-to-peer learning.
- Running the organization of demonstration actions as part of the projects of Operational Groups.
- Promoting the setting up of Operational Groups aimed at developing training and advisory models and tools for tailored services.

Training, discussion groups, peer-to-peer reviews, cross-visits and other forms of knowledge sharing

- Financial and professional incentives/awards for the active participation to professional networks, including Horizon EU projects.
- Financial and professional incentives/awards to up-date competences and to act as trainers of trainers
- Peer-to-peer learning programmes between advisors, cross visits, discussion groups and community of practice that enable systematic collective critical thinking and reflection along with individual learning.
- Vouchers to access to training programs, professional associations and networks.
- Vouchers to buy-in research/academic/expert back office.
- Support the setting up of Knowledge Sharing Platforms: Create platforms for sharing experiences, best practices, and lessons learned among advisors and project participants, facilitating ongoing communication and collaboration.

Information access and sharing:

- Back office.
- Public repositories of advisors, by detailing competences, topics and contacts, at the benefit of the farmers.
- Digital Datawarehouse that include relevant on-time data for advisory provision.
- Repository of benchmarks of farming indicators/systems.
- Good practices forums.
- Public awareness campaigns to inform about the availability of public funds for the use and provision of advisory services.

FIRST INSIGHTS FROM PRACTICES

The practices presented in this Compendium highlight the critical role of digital tools and data-driven systems in strengthening advisory services and promoting sustainable agricultural practices. For example, the **Advisors Support Service** in Spain demonstrates how a digital platform directly supports agricultural advisors by providing them with timely, expert knowledge. This enables advisors to better address farmers' needs and offer more effective, informed guidance. Similarly, the **Plant Protection Alert Service** in Austria offers a centralized platform that provides real-time alerts on pests and plant pathogens, facilitating better decision-making and encouraging collaboration between farmers, advisors, and researchers

FOOD FOR THINKING

Questions for opening the discussion and reflect on how to better direct AKIS interventions towards the better integration of the advisory services are:

Delivery:

- How to organize a feasible system for enabling access to impartial and high-quality service provision?
- How to design and implement advisory services aimed at providing a more targeted support addressing specific farmers' needs?[PP1]
- How can we enhance collaboration among various stakeholders (farmers, researchers, policymakers) to improve the effectiveness of advisory services?
- How mainstream the use/provision of advisory service across the variety of CAP interventions?
- What are the most pressing needs of farmers today that advisory services can address effectively?

Training and Capacity Building

- What training and capacity-building initiatives are necessary for advisors to effectively integrate into AKIS and meet current agricultural challenges?
- How can advisors be created and enhanced to facilitate knowledge sharing and collaboration across borders?

Monitoring and Evaluation

- How to assess/evaluate advisory service services, by capturing SWOTs, needs for development, actual pathways and effects?
- How to organize and conduct systematic evaluations of the advisory services?
- How can we measure the impact of advisory services within AKIS to ensure they are contributing to sustainable agricultural development?
- How to structure and ensure the implementation of assessment procedures for quality and performances of advisors at system, organizational and individual levels?

Long-Term Vision

- How to rethink the role and functions of public and private advisory services in the specific AKIS and how to vision their reorganization, in terms of infrastructures, organizations and competencies, to better address needs and opportunities for the modernization of the sector?

HOW TO FOLLOW-UP WITH THE RESULTS OF COLLECTION OF AKIS-IN-PRACTICE!

- The **collection of "AKIS-in-Practice"**must be expanded through continuous dialogue with partners to provide a broader scope of the different approaches of advisory services.
- A specific **networking** activity with Advisory networks projects (CORENET, EU4Advice, NBSoil, ClimateSmartAdvisors, OrganicAdviceNetwork, AdvisoryNetPEST, STRATUS) funded by Horizon EU that connect advisors across all EU Member States will help sharing knowledge and to be up to date about opportunities that these project can offer in term of training and support to implementing advisory services that are able to best tackle challenges or seize opportunities on farms, in forests and rural villages.
- J**oint workshops with the CoPs** might be directed to increase familiarity and to co-develop possibly innovative and major focused types of interventions and programs to support the major integration of advisory services within the AKIS.

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- EU SCAR AKIS (2019), Preparing for Future AKIS in Europe. Brussels, European Commission
- SWG SCAR-AKIS Policy Brief on the Future of Advisory Services

modernAKIS Together for Systems' Innovation

Methods&Tools for advisory services

Get-Inspired4AKIS! 6.5

Advisors support Service in the Spanish AKIS Advisors Platform

Keywords/Tags

- Advisory service
- Mentoring
- Digital Platform
- Knowledge Exchange

Potential users

- Agricultural and rural advisors
- Agri-Food Cooperatives and Farm Based Organisation through their advisory units
- Managing authorities seeking to support farm advisory services
- Paying agencies to reinforce the impact of funding activities
- Farmer training centres and other advisory networks
- Innovation Support Services

RATIONALE

Agricultural advisors are central to the Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS), serving as intermediaries between farmers, researchers, public administration, and other key stakeholders. They are tasked with addressing a range of complex technical questions in areas such as crop management, livestock production, sustainability, digitalization, market trends, and evolving regulatory frameworks.

In response to these challenges, the Spanish Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Food (MAPA) has developed a digital platform, the AKIS Advisors Platform, designed to support agri-food advisors across the country. The platform serves as a knowledge hub, offering comprehensive digital resources to facilitate the advisory function in Spain. Key features of the platform include:

- Access to technical documentation, regulatory updates, and sector information.
- Tools for consulting best practices and innovative solutions across agricultural sectors.
- Networking spaces for professional exchange between advisors and specialized institutions.

SOLUTION

To ensure agricultural advisors have reliable, evidence-based, and up-to-date information, MAPA has launched an Advisors Support Service as part of the AKIS Advisors Platform. This initiative, in its pilot phase, aims to strengthen the advisory function by providing direct access to expert advice, ensuring that knowledge is effectively disseminated throughout the agricultural sector.

The Advisors Support Service is a free, online helpdesk that allows registered advisors to submit specific technical queries. The service aims to bridge the gap between the knowledge needs of advisors and the scientific expertise available to meet those needs. The service operates as follows:

- Advisors can submit their queries via a web form or email.
- Submitted queries are routed to the most relevant expert institutions based on the specific topic.
- The queries are answered with practical, science-based information to support advisors in their daily work.

IN PRACTICE

The **Advisors Support Service** provides **free-of-charge online mentoring**, available to all registered users of the platform. Once a query is submitted, it is routed to the most relevant expert institution, which could be one of the following recognized advisory entities:

- **National Agri-Food Technology Centre of Extremadura (CTAEX).**
- **Business-Galician University Foundation (FEUGA).**
- **Navarre Institute of Agri-Food Technologies (INTIA).**
- **Agricultural Technological Institute of Castilla y León (ITACYL).**
- **Wine Technology Centre (VITEC).**
- **Production Systems Engineering Farming and Livestock - University of Córdoba (ISAG-UCO).**

The advisors then receive a documented response, often including bibliographic references, best practice recommendations, and tailored regulatory guidance. This ensures that advisors can address the practical challenges faced by farmers and agri-food stakeholders, adapting their responses to the relevant regulatory scale (EU, national, regional, or local).

Moreover, all platform users benefit from collaborative and practical knowledge shared across the platform's repositories, which are updated with the collective findings from the queries and responses. By acting as a knowledge multiplier, the Advisors Support Service ensures that high-quality, expert information is accessible to farmers and agri-food stakeholders nationwide.

Additionally, the platform offers a broad range of other services, such as:

- Training modules on emerging agricultural technologies and best practices.
- Guidelines and resources on regulatory compliance at various levels (EU, national, regional).
- Tools for creating farm management plans and assessing sustainability goals.
- Sector-specific webinars and online workshops to engage with experts and share knowledge.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR REPLICABILITY

The **Advisors Support Service** model is **fully replicable** in other EU Member States, with the possibility to adapt it according to local needs. Key considerations for replication include:

- **Coordinated expert networks or advisory entities** are essential for providing structured mentoring support.
- **Centralized query submission through digital platforms streamlines the service and makes it more accessible.**
- **A back-office infrastructure** is necessary to manage and process queries efficiently.
- **Public-private partnerships** could be explored to sustain the service financially, although the current model is funded by EU funds and operates free of charge.
- **Adaptability** to local regulations is straightforward, as national or regional governments are responsible for ensuring compliance.

It demonstrates how advisory services can be strengthened by pooling expertise and providing structured technical backstopping.

BENEFITS

- Free and easy access for registered advisors.
- Expert, up-to-date responses.
- Strengthens AKIS by connecting advisors with specialised institutions.
- Encourages evidence-based advisory work.
- Saves time for advisors and improves the quality of recommendations to farmers.
- Boosts knowledge transfer and innovation uptake.

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- AKIS Advisors Platform (ES): https://akisplataforma.es/asesoramiento-para-asesores.
- AKIS Advisors Platform LinkedIn (ES): https://www.linkedin.com/company/akisplataforma/.
- Support Advisors Service's video on youtube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TbNJifZgYf0
- Registration on the AKIS Advisor Platform (ES): https://akisplataforma.es/registro-de-usuarios.
- MAPA Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food website (ES): https://www.mapa.gob.es/es/desarrollo-rural/temas/innovacion-medio-rural/akis.

Spain

MAPA:
Manuel Villar Miguelez
mvillar@mapa.es
Carmen Gil Gómez
cggomez@mapa.es
Juan Pedro Romero Trueba
jpromero@mapa.es

modernAKIS Together for Systems' Innovation

Methods&Tools for advisory services

Get-Inspired4AKIS! 6.6

Plant protection alert service in Austria

Keywords/Tags

- Digital tools
- Decision support tools
- Innovation support services
- Monitoring & prediction model

Potential users

- Ministries responsible for agriculture, environment, or education
- AKIS coordination bodies at national or regional level
- Advisory services and agricultural consultants
- Research institutions focused on plant protection, agroecology, or digitalization

RATIONALE

Crops are exposed to numerous harmful factors throughout their entire growing season, leading to yield losses and reductions in quality. Simultaneously, societal demands for sustainable and low-residue production are increasing, putting significant pressure on the effectiveness of plant protection measures.

This heightened vulnerability and the increasing socio-economic demands directly underpin the stringent regulatory framework of the European Union. Specifically, while Regulation (EU) 2016/2031 on protective measures against plant pests does not explicitly mandate a centralized digital alert system, it imposes a set of obligations that, in practice, necessitate the implementation of comparable structures and functions.

The regulation on protective measures against plant pests and other pathogens obliges Member States to carry out systematic, risk-based surveys for quarantine pests, to establish multiannual monitoring programs, and to report findings annually to the European Commission. It also mandates timely notification of pest and pathogen outbreaks, the development of contingency and action plans for priority pests, and the provision of targeted information to both professional operators and the general public.

The regulation on protective measures against plant pests and other pathogens obliges Member States to carry out systematic, risk-based surveys for quarantine pests, to establish multiannual monitoring programs, and to report findings annually to the European Commission. It also mandates timely notification of pest and pathogen outbreaks, the development of contingency and action plans for priority pests, and the provision of targeted information to both professional operators and the general public.These requirements reflect a clear expectation that Member States maintain operational systems for early detection, risk communication, and coordinated response.
However, prior to 2015, alert systems in Austria were regionally fragmented and partly co-financed by the industry, a structure that was ill-equipped to meet these evolving regulatory and sectoral challenges.

SOLUTION

The **Plant Protection Alert Service (Pflanzenschutz-Warndienst)** informs agricultural holdings about the occurrence of pests based on regional monitoring and forecasting systems. The platform https://warndienst.at/ provides up-to-date early information on risks for plant health due to pests and other plant pathogens to agricultural holdings and supports them in implementing integrated plant protection. This measure strengthens knowledge flows between research and practice and serves as an example of effective cross-sectoral collaboration within Austria's AKIS.

It functions as a knowledge and information interface that connects research, advisory services, education, administration, and agricultural practice. Through its structure – comprising national coordination, regional implementation, and thematic specialization – it enables the systematic collection, processing, and dissemination of plant health-related data. This includes real-time monitoring results, model-based forecasts, and practical recommendations, all of which are made accessible to farmers and advisors via a centralized digital platform.

The service supports knowledge flows in multiple directions: scientific institutions such as AGES and the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences (BOKU) contribute research-based models and diagnostics; regional Chambers of Agriculture and advisors translate these into context-specific recommendations; and farmers provide field-level observations that feed back into the system. This reciprocal exchange strengthens the responsiveness and relevance of the information provided.

Furthermore, the integration of the alert service into vocational and higher agricultural education – through training, lectures, and digital learning materials – ensures that knowledge is not only transferred but also institutionalized. The platform thus contributes to capacity building and supports evidence-based decision-making in plant protection. Its accessibility, neutrality, and practical orientation make it a key instrument for implementing integrated pest management (IPM) and for promoting sustainable agricultural practices in line with EU policy objectives.

The Plant Protection Alert Service is driven by multiple key goals: i) providing timely information on the occurrence of pests and diseases to support preventive and targeted action, ii) ensuring efficient and reduced-use plant protection through risk-based decisions, ii) minimizing environmental impacts through knowledge-based approaches, and iv) contributing to transnational, European interlinking of alert systems—such as through the planned online database of the ERANET project C-IPM and other European initiatives.

Participation is voluntary, and the platform is non-commercial and independent of the plant protection industry, which reinforces its credibility. Beyond farmers and advisors, it also serves public authorities, educational institutions, and the wider public, fostering trust and cooperation among all stakeholders.

In addition to meeting EU requirements, Austria's system also aligns with the goals of the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC). The IPPC is a multilateral treaty under the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) that aims to stop the international spread of plant pests and diseases while ensuring safe trade in plants and plant products. As a signatory, Austria is committed to key principles such as surveillance, pest risk analysis, and transparent information sharing—principles that are reflected in the country's alert service. In this broader context, Austria's approach not only fulfills national and EU obligations but also contributes to global efforts to protect plant health.

IN PRACTICE

The Plant Protection Alert Service is coordinated by the Rural Training Institute (LFI) Austria as the official project sponsor and is implemented as part of a Ländliche Entwicklung (rural development) project in cooperation with the Chamber of Agriculture Austria (LKÖ), the BMLUK, and the nine regional Chambers of Agriculture. The LKÖ assumes the role of project lead and is responsible for the overall coordination and strategic direction of the initiative. The project is funded under the cooperation support scheme "Zusammenarbeit 77-02," which ensures its continuation for the period 2025 to 2028.

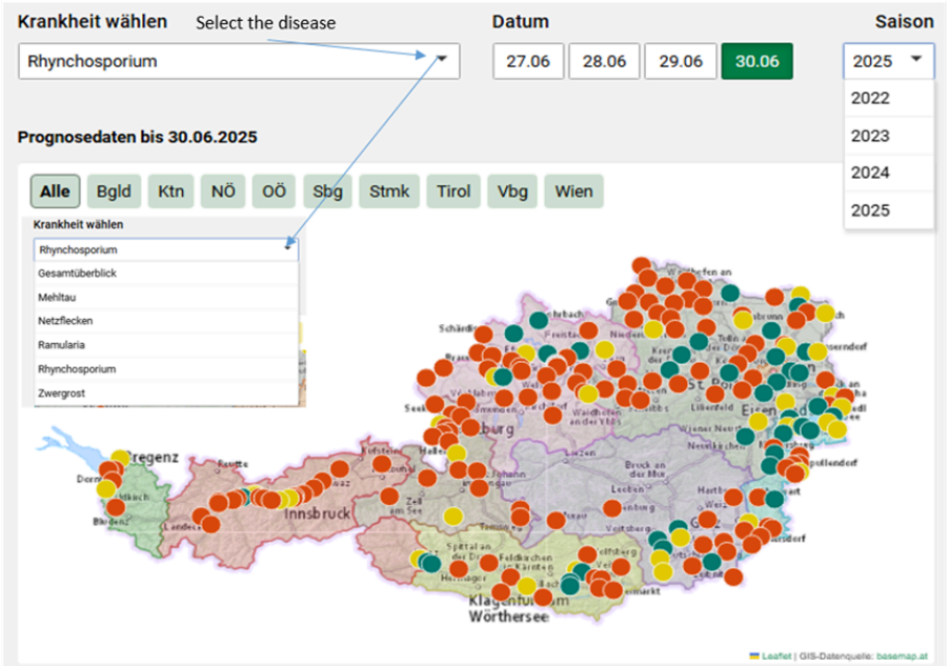
The organizational structure includes subject area coordinators for arable farming, vegetable production, fruit cultivation, viticulture, and bee health, as well as regional coordinators in all nine federal states. These coordinators are responsible for the practical implementation of the alert service and ensure that both thematic and regional issues can be addressed in a targeted and flexible manner.

The project is supported by a broad network of cooperation partners. In addition to the LKÖ, key contributors include the AGES, AGRANA Research & Innovation Center (AGRANA), and Bee Austria, all of whom provide specialized expertise in plant health, crop production, and apiculture.

Raiffeisen Ware Austria (RWA) supports the initiative as the main sponsor, providing essential financial backing. This collaborative structure ensures that this service remains scientifically robust, practice-oriented, and accessible to agricultural stakeholders across Austria.

Monitoring activities are conducted at over 600 locations using light, pheromone, and yellow traps. The data is centrally evaluated and published on the website. Since the introduction of a data app, transmissions of information happens digitally, improving timeliness and quality. The platform provides 61 monitoring maps and 39 forecasting models across arable, vegetable, fruit, and viticulture sectors, as well as bee protection, covering 70 selected pests throughout Austria. Forecast for leaf diseases using the example of Rhynchosporium in Winter barley on 30.06.2025.

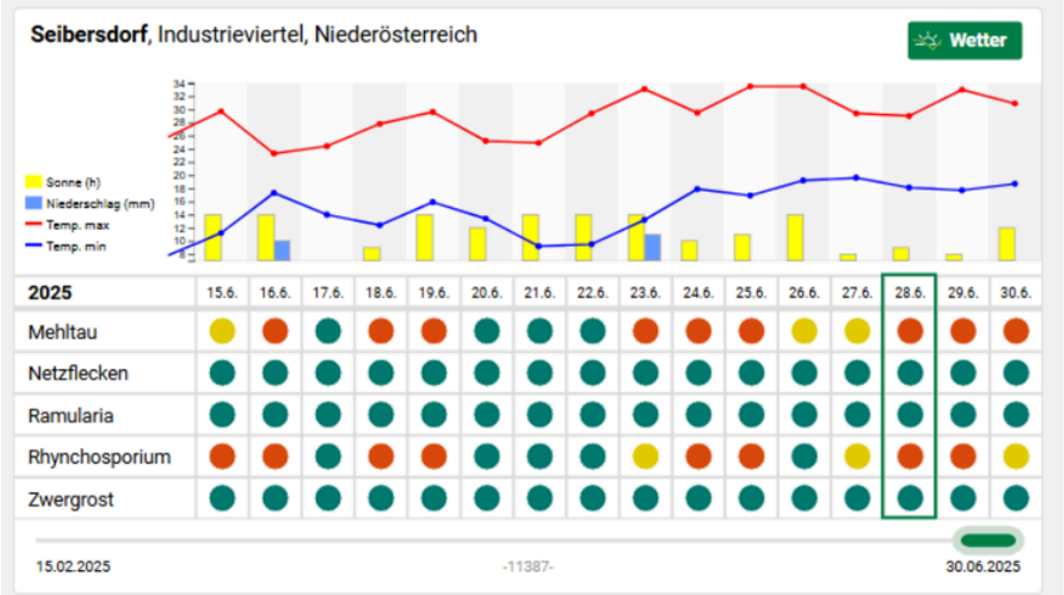
Figure 1: Example 1 of forecasted data



Source: Forecasting model for leaf diseases in winter barley

Figure 2: Example 2 of forecasted data

The models enable calculation of the critical stage of an epidemic and derivation of targeted measures.



Source: Forecasting model for leaf diseases in winter barley

Weather conditions and progression of the infestation during the forecast period.
Presentation of these and other forecast models at www.warndienst.at
The platform is continuously developed and recorded 978,645 visits in 2024.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR REPLICABILITY

Successful implementation requires central coordination, structured organization, digital infrastructure, and regional anchoring. The involvement of subject matter experts, regional coordinators, and technical partners is crucial. Key success factors include independence from industry interests, integration into educational structures, and continuous software maintenance. The use of established forecasting models and the inclusion of regional observation data are essential prerequisites. Challenges include harmonizing regional systems, ensuring data quality, and securing long-term funding.

BENEFITS

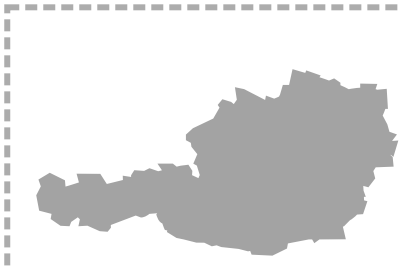
- Improved decision-making basis for farmers through up-to-date alerts
- Reduction in the use of plant protection products through targeted measures
- Promotion of environmentally friendly and sustainable crop production
- Increased transparency for the public
- Support in implementing legal requirements for integrated plant protection
- Contribution to cost savings and efficiency in crop production
- Minimization of environmental impacts and residue issues

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- Warndienst der Landwirtschaftskammern | Warndienst - Startseite.
- About us | Warndienst - Infobox.
- Alert service for plant protection in Austria | Warndienst - Erklärvideos.
- Flyer_Plant_protection_-_Alert_service - PDF.

Austria

Project leader:
DI Dr. Vitore Shala-Mayrhofer
v.shala-mayrhofer@lk-oe.at



modernAKIS Together for Systems' Innovation

Theme 7

Integration of innovation support services

Keywords/Tags

Innovation support services

Operational groups

Innovation support functions

RATIONALE

The CAP Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 requires EU Member States (MS) to provide support for innovation, in particular for the preparation and implementation of the EIP-Agri operational groups (OGs) whilst capturing and making use of grassroots innovative ideas (art. 15 (4) (e) and recital 50). The expected result is a general improvement of connections between actors, policies and programmes/projects, knowledge(s) and experience(s), methods and instruments to speed up the creation of innovative solutions.

Innovation support services (ISS) represent a novelty from a policy perspective and, therefore, require governance models, approaches, competences and tools that foster their effective implementation and embedding in the respective national/regional AKIS.

The term 'innovation support services' came into the mainstream a few years ago and it is new in the CAP framework.

To date, there is no shared understanding on ISS, neither in-depth analysis concerning the actors providing the services, their linkages with other actors and the support they provide to innovation processes. Furthermore, there is little awareness of the skills and competencies needed to improve services delivery.

Following recital 50, delivering innovation support services means to turn an innovative idea into a good innovation project plan by capturing individual grassroots innovative ideas, refining them, connecting relevant partners with useful expertise for the objective of the project, preparing a project proposal on which expectations of different actors converge (finding win-win), drafting a cooperation agreement and a final project proposal.

Indeed, this interpretation is rather narrow, compared to what is widely described by the literature, where ISS are referred to as "services that make innovation happen by fostering interactions and constructing knowledge". These include a wide range of activities aimed at creating the conditions for identifying and discussing solutions, opportunities and new ideas by combining perspectives, knowledge, experience and resources.

According to several European projects, ISS can be summed up into 7 functions (or services) and related activities, that are all important to enable an innovative process to move forward, starting from the birth of an idea to the design of an innovation project, its realisation and, finally, the dissemination and the embeddedness of the realized innovation in a wider environment.

Table 1: Innovation support functions and activities

ISS1. Awareness-raising and knowledge dissemination	ISS1. Description
	It includes all activities contributing to knowledge awareness, dissemination of scientific knowledge, or technical information for farmers. For instance, providing knowledge based on information dissemination forums (website, leaflets), meetings or demonstrations and exchange visits
	ISS1. Detailed activities
	Dissemination of information (website, brochures, magazines, newsletters, bulletins, webinars, etc.), organization of exchange visits, organization of demonstrations, etc. ○ Selection and evaluation of information ○ Transformation of information into documents (targets: advisors, farmers, etc.) ○ Language translation
	Meetings
	Communication of project results
	Supply of knowledge and technical information for innovation (knowledge transfer) ○ Selection and identification of know-how and transfer of knowledge /technologies
ISS2. Advisory, consultancy and backstopping	ISS2. Description
	It includes targeted, supportive activities aimed at solving complex problems (e.g., a new farming system), based on demands of actors and the co-construction of solutions
	ISS2. Detailed activities
	Articulation of advisory needs / specific need to provide a more targeted support ○ Data and information gathering ○ Design of tailored advisory packages
	"Management" of the innovation process (soft skills) ○ Support to find specialized advice
	Organization of backstopping pools (research / advisory / SME / etc.) to find a solution to a complex problem
ISS3. Demand articulation	ISS3. Description
	It includes all services targeted to help actors to express clear demands to other actors (research, service providers, etc.). This is targeted support to enhance the innovator's ability to express his/her needs to other relevant actors.
	ISS3. Detailed activities
	Needs analysis
	Strategy and vision development
	Feasibility analysis
	Searching for ideas and solutions
	Building bridges with users and intermediary organisations to make the need concrete, defining its contents, specificities and costs
ISS4. Networking facilitation and brokerage	ISS4. Description
	It includes the provision of services to help organize or strengthen networks, improve the relationships between actors and to align services in order to be able to complement each other (the right service at the right time and place). It also includes all activities aimed at strengthening collaborative and collective action.
	ISS4. Detailed activities

ISS5. Capacity building	ISS5. Description
	It includes services aimed at increasing innovation actors' capacities at the individual, collective and/or organizational level.
	ISS5. Detailed activities
	Traditional training/Face-to-Face individual training
	Peer-to-peer facilitation/Coaching
	Experiential learning
ISS6. Enhancing/ supporting access to resources	ISS6. Description
	It includes all services for innovators aimed at enhancing the acquisition of resources to support the process. This could be facilitating access to inputs (seeds, fertilizers etc.), facilities and equipment (technological platforms, labs etc.), and funding (credit, subsidies, grants, loans, etc.).
	ISS6. Detailed activities
	Facilitating access to facilities and equipment (technological platforms, laboratories, etc.)
	Facilitating access to inputs (seeds, fertilizers, etc.)
	Facilitating access to financial/insurance services
	Facilitating access to funding ○ Application preparation and submission to grants (e.g. OGs, HORIZON-EU, …)
	Project management
ISS7. Institutional support for niche innovation and scaling mechanisms stimulation	ISS7. Description
	It includes institutional support for niche innovation (incubators, experimental infrastructures etc.) and for scaling out and scaling up the innovation process. This refers to support for the design and enforcement of norms, rules, funding mechanisms, taxes, subsidies, etc. that facilitate the innovation process or the diffusion of innovation
	ISS7. Detailed activities
	Negotiation with authorities to create 'protect' space for experiments
	Provision of incubators and experimental infrastructures
	Support for the design and enforcement of norms, rules, funding mechanisms, etc. that facilitate the diffusion of innovation
	Brokerage along the production chain (ISS4)
	Exploitation strategy and action plan design and implementation
	Supporting intellectual property (patents) and patent authorization processes
	Negotiation with people affected by the innovation

Source: ATTRACTISS project

In practice, these services are carried out by a variety of providers who can be both public or private and can act with a specific mandate or just because they are interested in pushing the innovation process forward. However, hardly a single service provider is responsible for driving the whole innovation process, but different actors can coordinate with each other's contributing, by performing different functions, to achieve successful outcomes. This is because the services which are needed for driving a whole innovation process evolve along the process itself and might require different competences to be involved in a particular phase.

Currently, ISSs providers differ considerably across EU Member States depending on whether advisory systems are public/privatised, integrated/fragmented, centralised/decentralized.

Due to the novelty of the intervention, it is therefore interesting to see how the different Member States are arranging to meet the regulatory requirement.



FIRST INSIGHTS FROM PRACTICES

The practice presented in this Compendium highlights the **Danish Agricultural Knowledge Hubs**, coordinated by SEGES Innovation, which plays a pivotal role in bridging the gap between scientific research and practical farming. By structuring the hubs around specialized thematic areas such as crop production, livestock, climate technology, and business management, this practice enhances the capacity of farmers to meet sustainability goals while maintaining profitability. The integration of **digital tools** within these hubs further enhances their impact, enabling farmers to make data-driven decisions and improve operational efficiency. This approach highlights the importance of creating strong, well-coordinated knowledge networks that connect research, advisory services, and farmers, with a focus on practical application and continuous knowledge sharing.

FOOD FOR THINKING

In this perspective, we could raise a few questions (not exhaustive) to help us reflect on how to better direct AKIS interventions towards the effective organization of innovation support services:

- How to ensure innovation support from the beginning to the end on an innovation process?
- How to give visibility to the variety of innovation support services and providers, recognising the functions they perform to support innovation and, consequently, to the AKIS development?
- How to strengthen competencies that are needed to carry out innovation support services?
- How to incentivize ISS to join operational groups?

HOW TO FOLLOW-UP WITH THE RESULTS OF COLLECTION OF AKIS-IN-PRACTICE!

- Continuous exchange with the ATTRACTISS project, to be updated on relevant outcomes and activities
- Collection, jointly with the ATTRACTISS project, of the key features of Innovation Support Services in the different MSs in view to share information for knowledge and further interaction.
- Practice workshops, aimed at sharing practices, reflecting on experiences and effectiveness on the models applied to organise and integrate innovation support services and their providers within the AKISs and promote grassroot innovation

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- ATTRACTISS, Deliverable 1.1 Conceptual grounds and common understanding: state of the art, https://attractiss.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/ATTRACTISS_WP1_-D1.1.-Conceptual-grounds-_V5_310123.pdf
- ATTRACTISS, Deliverable 5.8 MA Handbook: monitoring, reporting, evaluating success of ISS measures in CAP AKIS Strategic Plans, https://attractiss.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/D5.8.pdf
- ATTRACTISS, Deliverable 4.1 Development of training curricula and agreed delivery, https://attractiss.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/D4.1.pdf
- ATTRACTISS, Deliverable 4.2 Updated toolbox developed based on the i2connect project (facilitation for innovation systems) https://attractiss.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/D4.2.pdf
- EU SCAR AKIS (2019), Preparing for Future AKIS in Europe. Brussels, European Commission. https://scar-europe.org/images/AKIS/Documents/report-preparing-for-future-akis-in-europe_en.pdf

modernAKIS Together for Systems' Innovation

Innovation support services

AKIS-in-Practice! 7.3

Denmark's Agricultural Knowledge Hub: Integrating Research, Advice and Innovation

Keywords/Tags

- Knowledge hubs
- Digitalisation
- Advisory services
- Digital tool

Potential users

- Managing authorities
- Researchers
- Advisors
- Farmers
- Trainers

RATIONALE

Denmark's Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS) is characterised by a well-integrated, robust, and highly functional advisory system that provides guidance on all aspects of agriculture and plays a central role in translating scientific research into applied, sustainable farming practices.

A strong historical tradition of cooperation within Danish agriculture, combined with institutionalised advisory structures and a strategic focus on digitalisation, ensures that farmers receive timely, tailored, and high-quality advice. Importantly, Denmark allocates substantial public funding to research and development in the food and agricultural sectors, including through agricultural funds. Each year, the state invests approximately DKK 800 million (around EUR 107 million) in R&D activities, underpinning the scientific foundation and innovation capacity of the system.

Danish advisory services, in close collaboration with research institutions, carry out systematic testing and demonstration activities whose results are broadly shared with farmers. The Danish AKIS places strong emphasis on developing technologies that enhance both farm profitability and environmental performance. Knowledge exchange between farmers and advisors is rapid, circular, and non-hierarchical, ensuring that farmers' practical needs directly shape research priorities and innovation processes.

Although the Danish AKIS operates largely outside the framework of CAP implementation, it nonetheless effectively supports the EU's strategic goals—particularly those related to knowledge transfer, innovation, and the digital transition. Despite its strong performance, there remains a continued need to empower farmers as active users and co-creators of knowledge, enabling them to swiftly adapt to emerging challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and economic pressures, while enhancing both competitiveness and sustainability.

SOLUTION

SEGES Innovation, the Danish knowledge centre for agriculture, was established in 1971 as part of the Danish agricultural cooperative's research and development structure. The purpose was to provide scientifically based knowledge for the local advisory centres, farmers and other stakeholders, combined with technical development, and innovation to strengthen the competitiveness and sustainability of the agricultural and food sector in Denmark. SEGES was until 2022 a part of the Danish Agriculture & Food Council. In 2022 SEGES Innovation P/S was founded, as an independent, non-profit research and innovation company, after its activities was transferred from the Danish Agriculture & Food Council group to emphasise that the company's research, innovation and communications are conducted independently of special interests, including business policy interests.

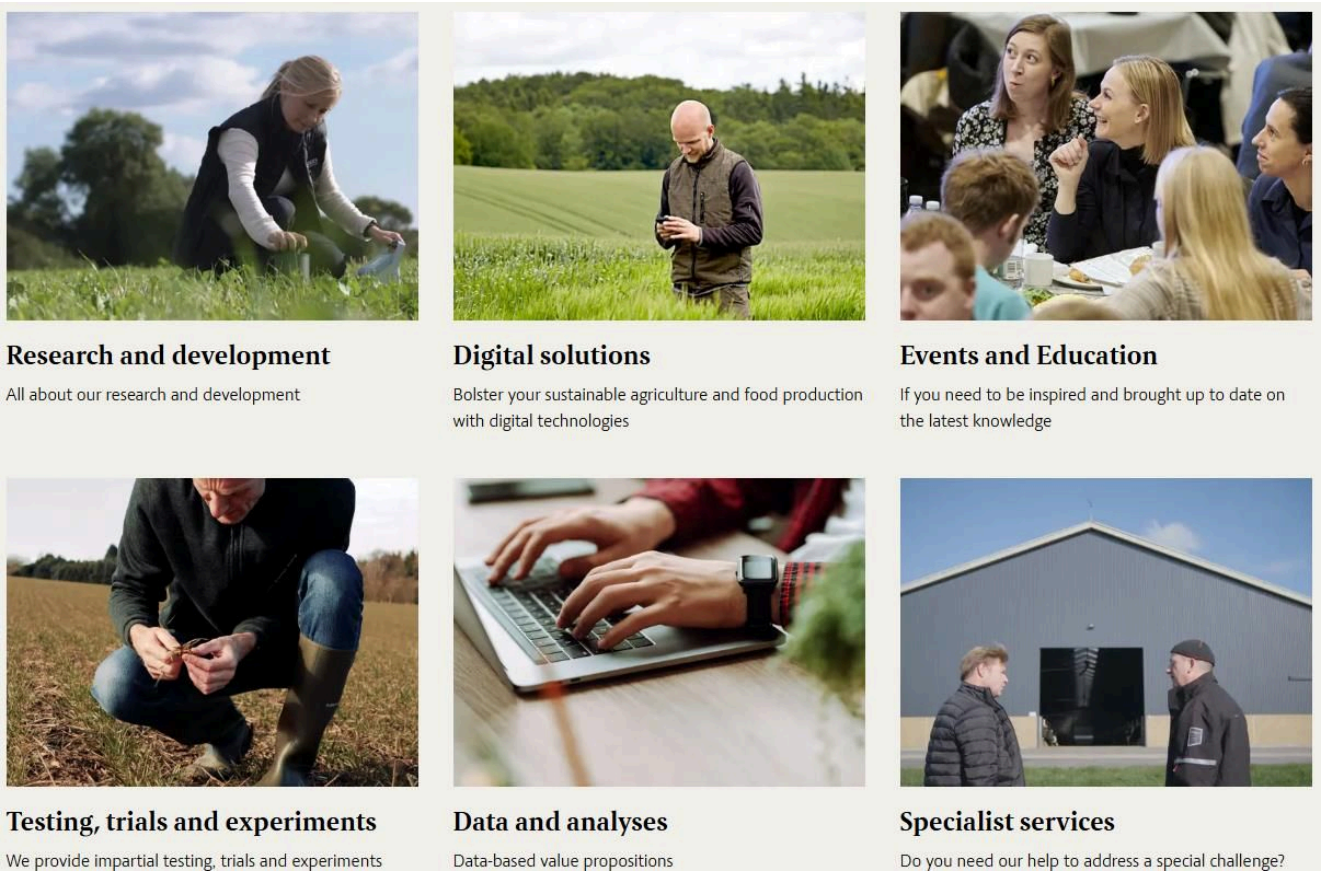
SEGES Innovation has continued to play a very central role in developing sustainable solutions for the agricultural and food sector. The organization collaborates with universities, authorities, and companies both in Denmark and internationally, and focuses on combining scientific expertise with digital technology to promote sustainable food production. It continues to work as the connecting link between universities, advisors and farmers. SEGES Innovation acts as research, innovation and knowledge facilitator. It is an effective system for knowledge sharing, agricultural advice and cooperation between partners in the value chain with a view to translating new knowledge from research into agricultural practice. The system can quickly, and efficiently initiate research and innovation activities based on farmers' needs, including in nationally supported collaborations with researchers and farmers, and to disseminate results and new practices.

At the moment, SEGES Innovation has approximately 500 employees and the head office is located in Agro Food Park, Denmark's largest industry specialised network within agriculture and food. More than 85 companies and a total of 1.300 employees are part of Agro Food Park.
Each department within SEGES Innovation functions as a knowledge hub focused on a specific subject area:

- Crops & Environment (Planter & Miljø): Conducts research and development in sustainable crop production, the environment and nature.
- Livestock (Husdyr): Focuses on sustainable livestock farming and development in animal husbandry.
- Climate & Environmental Technology (Klima & Miljøteknologi): Works on issues related to climate, sustainability in agriculture and environmental technology.
- Business & Financial Management (Ledelse & Økonomi): Provides support in business strategy and leadership for agricultural enterprises.
- Digital Products & Operations (Digitale løsninger): Develops and implements digital solutions to improve the efficiency of farming operations.

In addition to SEGES Innovation, there is also a separate knowledge hub for organic production – Innovation Centre for Organic Farming (Innovationscenter for Økologisk Landbrug) – located in Agro Food Park, which specializes in the development of future organic farming.

Figure 1: Services provided by SEGES Innovation



IN PRACTICE

In Denmark, farm advisory services are fully integrated within an efficient knowledge and innovation system that connects agricultural advisors, research institutes, public authorities, and private companies.

This integrated framework fosters continuous dialogue between farmers and advisors, promoting innovation across the agricultural and food sectors. Advisors assist farmers in developing their own innovation projects, identifying relevant partners, and applying for financial support.

SEGES Innovation plays a central coordinating role in this system. It gathers innovation ideas from farmers and advisors—often through workshops and meetings—and consolidates the most promising ones into applications for national funding programmes. SEGES Innovation also ensures that farmers and advisors have timely access to the latest technological and scientific information, supporting evidence-based decision-making. Knowledge and solutions are shared through the platform *www.landbrugsinfo.dk*, where farmers, advisors, and other stakeholders can access up-to-date results and practical tools. Dissemination is further enhanced through digital media, including videos, podcasts, webinars, and social channels, ensuring broad and interactive communication across the sector.

The organisation and vertical integration are supported by a number of purpose-driven nationally funded collaborations in programs, partnerships and projects. For example, the national research and innovation promotion schemes such as Innovation Fund Denmark and the Green Development and Demonstration Program (GUDP) provide support for specific collaborative research, innovation and demonstration projects between research institutions, Danish agricultural advisory services, companies and agriculture.

SEGES Innovation serves as the key connecting link between universities, advisory services, and farmers. It is structured into several specialised knowledge hubs, each focusing on a specific thematic area and operating through a nationwide network of advisory centres across Denmark. The main SEGES Innovation hubs include:

Crops & Environment (Planter & Miljø)

• **Purpose:** To develop and disseminate sustainable and efficient methods for crop production, the environment and nature.

• **Mission:** Through applied research and practical trials, develop new solutions to increase yields, improve soil health, and reduce environmental impact. This includes e.g. plant nutrition, crop protection, and climate adaptation. The hub also works with issues related to soil and water quality, biodiversity, and environmental regulations. It supports farmers in meeting environmental goals while maintaining competitive production.

Livestock (Husdyr)

• **Purpose:** To improve sustainability, animal welfare, and productivity in livestock farming.

• **Mission:** Develop solutions for feeding, housing environments, animal health, and economics in dairy, pig, broiler and beef production. Collaborates with both research and practice

Climate & Environmental Technology (Klima & Miljøteknologi)

• **Purpose:** To contribute to show the way towards securing the sustainable agriculture of the future.

• **Mission:** Works with issues related to climate impact, the interplay between agricultural production and energy technologies. The hub provides advice to biogas facilities and supports farmers in meeting environmental goals. It also works to measure and reduce emissions of greenhouse gases, ammonia and odours from livestock production processes.

Business & Financial Management (Ledelse & Økonomi)

• **Purpose:** To strengthen business competence in agricultural enterprises.

• **Mission:** Provides tools, analyses, and advice in strategy, leadership, financing, and organizational development. Helps farmers develop their businesses in the long term.

Digital products & Operations (Digitale løsninger)

• **Purpose:** To drive digital transformation in agriculture.

• **Mission:** Develops digital tools, platforms, and solutions that contribute to more efficient operations, data-driven decision-making, and innovation. Here, technological development aligns with practical farming needs.

Innovation Centre for Organic Farming (ICOEL)

• **Purpose:** To promote organic production through research, development, and knowledge dissemination.

• **Mission:** Outside of SEGES Innovation, but located in Agro Food Park, ICOEL works on developing the future of organic farming. The focus is on sustainable cultivation systems, soil fertility, organic production standards, and market development.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR REPLICABILITY

This practice serves as an inspiring example of how the organization of knowledge hubs can be structured. See also, for example, Sweden's knowledge hubs (AKIS-in-practice!6.4) have been inspired by this Danish model – but which do not have the hubs within the same organization, nor do they have long-term funding secured for all the hubs.
Some implications should be considered for its potential replicability:

- Ensure sufficient budget allocation: Allocate an adequate budget within the CAP intervention / National funds to support the sustainability of the knowledge hub during and beyond the programming period.
- Integration with Digital Infrastructure: Investing in digital tools and open data access boosts adoption and impact, especially when aligned with farmer workflows.

BENEFITS

- **Integrated Structure:**
  All hubs operate within a single organization, ensuring coordination, coherence, and knowledge sharing across thematic areas.
- **Scientific and Practical Synergy:**
  Each hub combines applied research with practical implementation, creating solutions that are both evidence-based and field-relevant.
- **Specialized Focus Areas:**
  The hubs cover key domains—crop production, animal production, environment, nature, climate, business management, and digitalization—allowing for deep expertise in each area.
- **Direct Support to Farmers:**
  The hubs provide tools, advice, and innovations that are directly applicable to farm operations, increasing efficiency, sustainability, and profitability.
- **Strong Collaboration Ecosystem:**
  SEGES Innovation works closely with universities, authorities, and industry, both nationally and internationally, fostering robust innovation pipelines.
- **Digital Transformation Leadership:**
  The digitalization hub leads in developing tech solutions for data-driven agriculture and decision-making, accelerating modern farming practices.
- **Support for Sustainability Goals:**
  Hubs help farmers meet environmental targets without sacrificing competitiveness, aligning Danish agriculture with broader climate and biodiversity commitments.
- **Model for Other Countries:**
  The SEGES Innovation system has served as a template for similar initiatives abroad, such as in Sweden, offering a proven framework for organizing agricultural knowledge and innovation.

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- SEGES Innovation website: https://segesinnovation.com/.
- Innovation Centre for Organic Farming website: https://icoel.dk/en/.
- SEGES Innovation company video: https://segesinnovation.com/about-us/our-company/.
- SEGES Innovation Profile brochure: https://segesinnovation.com/media/2hap5qpu .praesentationspixi_2025_150x150_uk_web.pdf.

Denmark

Director, Project Office:
Kirsten Klitgaard,
krk@seges.dk.

modernAKIS Together for Systems' Innovation

Theme 8

Climate change mitigaton & Environmental care

Keywords/Tags

- Environmental care
- Climate change mitigation
- Farmer
- Sustainability
- Biodiversity

RATIONALE

Agriculture is one of the sectors most vulnerable to climate change, facing pressures from water scarcity, shifting precipitation patterns, heat stress, and extreme weather events like droughts and floods. These factors disrupt farming cycles and increase the risk of diseases and pests. In the EU, agriculture is particularly susceptible, and its resilience is critical for mitigating potential climate impacts. Sustainable agriculture must incorporate the ability to adapt to changing climatic conditions.

Despite the challenges, agriculture plays a vital role in climate change mitigation. Farmland, through crops, hedgerows, and trees, sequesters carbon, while well-managed soils and grasslands provide long-term carbon storage. The EU agricultural sector has reduced its greenhouse gas emissions by 24% between 1990 and 2021, contributing around 11% of total emissions, primarily from methane and nitrous oxide associated with livestock and fertilization practices. Protecting soil is essential, as it supplies crucial nutrients and support for plant growth.

The Agenda 2030 and the Paris Agreement emphasize the need for transformational shifts toward climate-resilient development, by underscoring the importance of strengthen adaptive capacities for vulnerable populations facing climate-related hazards and other shocks, like the COVID-19 pandemic.

The EU is committed to the Paris Agreement, setting ambitious targets for a 40% reduction in emissions by 2030 across all economic sectors, which necessitates significant efforts in agricultural and forestry practices to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and implement adaptation strategies.

In response, the European Green Deal's Farm to Fork strategy provides a framework for transitioning to a sustainable food system, enabling farmers to meet food demands while protecting the climate. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) for 2023-2027 aims to facilitate the transition towards sustainable agriculture by supporting climate change mitigation and adaptation, enhancing carbon sequestration, promoting sustainable energy, and efficiently managing natural resources. It focuses on reducing chemical dependency and maintaining biodiversity through climate-smart innovations.

Aligned with the European Green Deal and Farm to Fork strategy, the CAP has three key environmental goals: tackling climate change, protecting natural resources, and enhancing biodiversity. It promotes these objectives by encouraging organic farming and responsible management of pesticides and fertilizers, enabling farmers to produce safe and healthy food while safeguarding natural resources and contributing to climate change mitigation. To achieve its environmental goals sustainably for farmers and rural communities, the CAP includes several measures:

- **Conditionality Standards:** Financial support is linked to compliance with EU environmental, health, and safety rules.
- **Eco-Schemes:** These encourage farmers to adopt practices that contribute to EU environmental and climate goals.
- **Rural Development Interventions:** Support is provided for commitments related to agri-environment-climate, sustainable forest management, investments, cooperation, and knowledge transfer, all aimed at promoting climate action, sustainable resource management, and biodiversity.

All of this requires comprehensive cooperation among policymakers, local communities, and global stakeholders, fostering transdisciplinary scientific collaboration that encompasses ecological, social, economic, and ethical dimensions.

To effectively tackle climate change, countries need proactive and flexible approaches that integrate risk management strategies. Embracing systemic approaches is essential for climate change mitigation and environmental care, as these frameworks recognize the interconnectedness of ecological, social, and economic systems. They promote a holistic understanding of climate challenges, enabling solutions that address root causes rather than just symptoms.

Central to these approaches is the concept of resilience, which emphasizes the need for adaptive capacity within social-ecological systems to enhance environmental health and community well-being. Systemic strategies foster collaboration across sectors, encouraging innovation and collective action, with successful examples including ecosystem-based management and circular economy models.

Besides, policy implementation must tackle various barriers that hinder the adoption of new technologies and the transformation of production systems. These barriers encompass bio-physical constraints, cognitive and behavioural challenges, and social and institutional factors.

Essential for effectively addressing climate change mitigation and enhancing environmental care is the use of shared datasets obtained through advanced land monitoring technologies, such as satellites. This includes establishing common indicators and robust monitoring systems to improve reporting and verification of emissions and removals, enable informed decision-making, and foster coordinated efforts across sectors to address climate challenges and promote sustainable practices.



HOW CAN STRENGTHENING AKIS STRATEGIES CONTRIBUTE TO ACHIEVING CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION AND ENHANCING ENVIRONMENTAL CARE?

Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) play a crucial role in modernizing the agricultural sector while strengthening environmental care and climate change mitigation through collaborative research and innovation, advisory, innovation support services, knowledge sharing and digitalization.

In general, AKIS-related interventions help acquire and develop the awareness and capacities needed to engage in more sustainable practices and consumption. This empowers farmers, advisors, and other AKIS actors to better navigate transformative paths toward a more sustainable and resilient agricultural sector. Additionally, it promotes sustainable-oriented research and innovation that addresses the actual barriers and challenges impeding these transformative pathways.

In light of the AKIS systemic approach, it is crucial to interconnect the various types of AKIS-related interventions with those that more directly address environmental care, including biodiversity preservation and restoration, as well as climate change mitigation.

Among the others some effective interventions might be the followings (list not exhaustive):

Cooperation for innovation

- Encourage collaborative models for sustainability-oriented R&I.
- Promoting the development of collective sustainability-oriented farming protocols and business models that are tailored upon the specific territory.
- Encourage innovative solutions for monitoring and verifying climate-sensitive performance, translating these efforts into economic benefits and competitive advantages for farmers.
- Promoting multiactor cooperation for sustainability-oriented governance and partnership models that foster collective climate change action.

Training, discussion groups, peer-to-peer reviews, cross-visits and other forms of knowledge sharing

- Training, and demonstrations on farms on sustainable practices, including organic farming, agroecology, and regenerative agriculture.
- Training on EU environmental and health regulations, including CAP conditionality standards (SMR and GAECC).
- Training and demonstrations on farms on the use of precision farming, including technologies such as GPS, drones, and data analytics for efficient resource management.
- Training and demonstrations on farms on integration of renewable energy and resource management.
- Demonstration actions, through showcase of innovative sustainable practices and technologies to encourage adoption. Demonstration actions might be promoted as part of operational groups' dissemination or as solely initiatives organized by innovative eco-friendly farms and as part of wider training programmes. Moreover, this type of intervention might include the setting up, coordination and implementation of networks demonstration eco-friendly farms.
- Training on new business models and use of tools for sustainability-oriented farm management.
- Research-and-Trainers/Advisors knowledge exchange initiatives, to incentive collaborations in view of keeping researchers/advisors informed on the latest problems on fields/research and innovations in sustainable agriculture.
- Training on accessing CAP funding, grants, and incentives for sustainable practices and public goods.

Advisory and innovation support services:

- Tailored Advisory Services: One-on-one consultations to assess specific farm contexts and tailor sustainability strategies, and support action plan development (e.g. nutrient management, efficient fertilizer use and soil health; resource efficiency and diversification; irrigation management and water-efficient cropping systems).
- Knowledge and innovation brokerage on sustainable agriculture.
- Development of and use emissions tracking advisory tools to monitor greenhouse gas emissions.

Information access and sharing:

- Partnership Development: Facilitating networks among farmers, researchers, NGOs, and local authorities for knowledge sharing.
- Benchmarking: Establishing performance benchmarks to evaluate water, soil, and energy use against peers.
- Good practices forums: Organizing events for farmers/advisors to share successful sustainability initiatives and innovations.
- Public awareness campaigns: Engaging the wider community in understanding the benefits of sustainable farming.
- Climate impact guidance: Providing resources and tools to assess and adapt to changing climate conditions and performances.

FIRST INSIGHTS FROM PRACTICES

The practice presented in this *Compendium* illustrates how AKIS interventions can support climate change actions and environmental care, showcasing the French initiative "**AGLAE**", which combines structured peer-to-peer learning with expert validation to support the agroecological transition. Coordinated by the Occitanie Chambers of Agriculture, AGLAE provides a regional platform where farmers can share tested agroecological practices. These practices are qualified by a multidisciplinary expert committee to ensure technical coherence, assess risks, and evaluate transferability. Once validated, they are disseminated through accessible formats such as video testimonials and technical sheets, making them available to farmers, advisors, students, and other stakeholders.

This approach helps strengthen local capacities by reducing the risks associated with adopting new methods and by transforming individual innovations into reliable technical references. It also underscores the importance of bottom-up knowledge sharing, supported by advisory services and communication tools, to facilitate ecological transition.

FOOD FOR THINKING

Questions for opening the discussion and reflect on how to better direct AKIS interventions towards a climate change mitigation are:

Delivery:

- How to combine AKIS-relating interventions with territorial and sectoral interventions?
- How to organize a monitoring and advisory program for demonstration sustainable farms?
- What incentives could be introduced to encourage farmers to engage more actively in climate change mitigation efforts?
- How can we foster stronger collaboration among stakeholders (farmers, advisors, researchers, policymakers) to enhance the effectiveness of AKIS interventions?
- How can we improve communication strategies to raise awareness about the importance of climate change mitigation among farmers and stakeholders?

SWOT & Needs Assessment:

- What are the current strengths and weaknesses of existing AKIS interventions in addressing climate change?
- How can we better assess the specific needs of farmers and local communities to ensure AKIS interventions are relevant and effective for climate change mitigation?
- What barriers do farmers face in adopting climate-friendly technologies, and how can AKIS support overcoming these challenges?

Training and Capacity Building

- How to organize a network of demonstration sustainable farms?
- What types of training programs are most needed to equip farmers with the knowledge and skills to implement sustainable practices?

Monitoring and Evaluation

- How can we improve the monitoring and evaluation of AKIS interventions to measure their impact on climate change mitigation?
- Which relevant information and tools are already available and how to benefit from them?
- Are there successful examples of AKIS interventions from other regions or countries that we can learn from in our approach to climate change?
- Which benchmarks are already in place?

Long-Term Vision:

- What long-term goals should AKIS interventions aim for to ensure a sustainable agricultural sector that effectively addresses climate change?



HOW TO FOLLOW-UP WITH THE RESULTS OF COLLECTION OF AKIS-IN-PRACTICE!

- The **collection of "AKIS-in-Practice"** must be expanded through continuous dialogue with partners to provide a broader scope of the different approaches that can contribute to achieving CAP specific objectives relating to climate change and environmental care.
- Joint workshops, informative and capacity building sessions with EU research and innovation projects focusing on the specific topics to share knowledge and to put in use already delivered practical advisory/monitoring tools and guiding documents (e.g. policy briefs, interventions schemes, digital tools). Among the others, for example, some relevant projects are: **TOOLS4CAP, SEN4CAP, CALLISTO, ECO-READY** and other projects, for example from HORIZON-MISS-CLIMA calls.
- **Joint workshops with the CoPs** might be directed to increase familiarity and to co-develop possibly innovative and major focused combinations of AKIS and non-AKIS interventions that can support more effectively capacity enhancement for ecological transitions.

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- What the CAP does for climate change
- Climate change and agriculture in the EU
- Climate change EC webpage

modernAKIS Together for Systems' Innovation

Climate change mitigaton & Environmental care

AKIS-in-practice! 8.4

AGLAE: Farmers share their agroecological practices

Keywords/Tags

- Peer-to-peer learning
- Agroecology
- Demo-farms
- Discussion groups
- Study visits
- Dissemination

Potential users

- Managing authorities
- AKIS coordination bodies
- Advisory services
- Farmers
- Researchers
- NGOs
- Training bodies

RATIONALE

The agroecological transition in French agriculture presents both an increasing opportunity and an urgent necessity for local farming systems. This transition is not merely optional; it is actively promoted by France's National Strategic Plan (NSP) under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) 2023–2027. Through mechanisms such as "eco-regimes," this policy provides financial incentives to farmers who adopt sustainable practices. Nevertheless, farmers today face numerous challenges—from economic pressures to environmental constraints—that compel them to adapt their practices.

Moreover, this top-down incentive creates a substantial challenge at the grassroots level. Although much innovation already takes place in the fields, as farmers continually innovate to adapt, such knowledge remains fragmented and often undisclosed to others. The central question, therefore, is how to effectively disseminate this ground-level innovation. This challenge is heightened by the fact that implementing new solutions can be complex and, importantly, financially risky for farmers.

SOLUTION

The solution is the **AGLAE - les Agriculteurs partaGent Leurs prAtiques agroÉcologiques** (Farmers Share Their Agro-Ecological Practices) initiative.

This was initiated by a partnership coordinated by the Occitanie Chambers of Agriculture to create a trusted system that promotes the exchange of tested and approved practices, thereby mitigating the risk for farmers and bridging the gap between national policy goals and on-the-ground implementation.

AGLAE is not merely an informal farmer-to-farmer exchange; it is a structured regional platform designed to create a qualified repository (a 'référentiel') of innovative agroecological practices. This repository draws directly from the real-world experiences of farmers across various sectors, including field crops, viticulture, and arboriculture in the Occitanie region.

The fundamental originality of AGLAE lies in its qualification phase.

The purpose is not just to collect experiences, but to rigorously validate them. Before any practice is disseminated, it is analyzed by a regional expert committee (comprising researchers, technical institutes, and advisors). This committee is crucial for:

1. Technical Coherence: Assessing the scientific and agronomic solidity of the practice.
2. Risk Assessment: Evaluating the level of risk associated with its adoption by other farmers.
3. Transferability: Determining whether the innovation can be successfully replicated in different farm contexts.

By passing this expert-led qualification, AGLAE acts as a "quality filter," transforming an individual farmer's testimony into a reliable technical reference. This process is designed to "secure the advice" given to farmers and advisors, generating the confidence needed to adopt new methods and effectively reducing the risk inherent in agroecological transition.

IN PRACTICE

The AGLAE initiative is structured around the following operational phases:

1. **Identification:** Agricultural network facilitators and project partners identify farmers in Occitania (across sectors like field crops, viticulture, and arboriculture) who are successfully implementing innovative practices (e.g., using catch crops to combat weeds, or specific seeding techniques).
2. **Qualification:** The farmer's experience is presented to the expert committee. This group analyzes and discusses the practice (often involving the farmer and their advisor) and assesses whether it is technically sound and if the results are reliable.
3. **Approval:** If the committee positively "qualifies" the practice, it is approved for dissemination.

4. **Capitalisation and Dissemination:** The validated experience is documented and converted into easily consultable material. This includes:
Testimonial Sheets (Fiches témoignages): Technical documents that detail the practice, the farm context, and the results.
Video Testimonials (Vidéos témoignages): Interviews with farmers explaining their innovation.
5. **Access**: This material (the "AGLAE" repository) is then published and made accessible to everyone (farmers, advisors, students) through various channels, such as the websites of the Occitanie Chamber of Agriculture, the GECO platform, and YouTube.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR REPLICABILITY

- Allocation of funds specifically for bottom-up identification, using existing farm networks and impartial advisors as "scouts" to capture real-world, proven innovations
- Availability of a transdisciplinary expert team to form the qualification committee, rigorously validating innovative practices before public dissemination
- Availability of a communication team to create standardized, multi-format resources such as technical sheets and professional video testimonials
- Availability of an ICT expert team to develop a centralized public repository of farming practices

BENEFITS

For farmers:

- **Peer-to-Peer Trust and Learning:** Direct testimonials (video/sheets) from fellow farmers build confidence and trust in the shared practices and their adoption.
- **Access to Validated Innovation:** Farmers gain practices identified, tested, and evaluated by experts, significantly reducing the risk associated with adoption.
- **System Adaptation and Resilience:** The process aids farmers in understanding and adapting their systems, enhancing resilience and environmental performance.

For advisors:

- **Secured and Qualified Advice:** Advisors receive reliable, validated references, allowing them to recommend innovative agroecological practices with confidence.
- **Centralized Innovation Resource:** Advisors gain a structured, centralized knowledge repository to effectively guide farmers through the complex agroecological transition.

For public funders:

- **Effective Dissemination and Reach**, through multiple channels (YouTube, social media), maximizing the return on public investment.
- **Practice-based Knowledge Capitalization** from farmer innovation, leading to transforming local, informal knowledge into qualified reference documents.

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

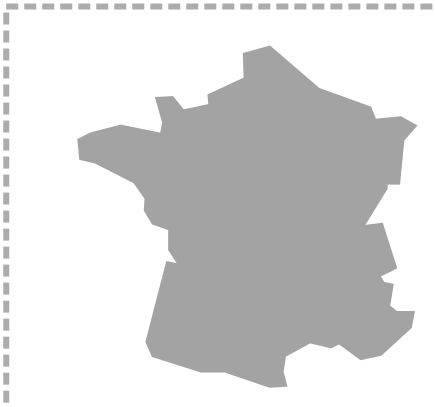
Website of AGLAE initiative:

- https://occitanie.chambres-agriculture.fr/sinformer/agroenvironnement/collectifs-agroecologiques/aglae

Occitanie- France

Myriam GASPARD:
myriam.gaspard@occitanie.chambagri.fr

Watch this AKIS-in-Practice!



Theme 9
Support to generational renewal

Keywords/Tags

- Young farmers
- Direct payments
- Complementary income support
- Sustainability
- Rural Development

RATIONALE

Young people play a vital role in shaping the future of agriculture and rural areas in the EU. However, the aging farmer population presents a significant challenge, as the proportion of in 2005, 7.3 % of EU farm managers under the age of 35 years old (a ceiling taken in order to enable comparisons) declined from 7.3% in 2005 to 6.5% in 2020. To address these issues, a comprehensive approach is needed, particularly in tackling the knowledge divide across different regions.

Generational renewal goes beyond merely reducing the average age of farmers; it also involves understanding the needs and aspirations of rural youth and creating an environment that fosters attachment to rural areas. Achieving this requires not only encouraging participation in diverse networks and communities, empowering the next generation to adapt to challenges and seize new opportunities, but also addressing significant barriers, such as access to land and capital, that hinder young people from entering the farming sector.

In previous programming periods, CAP generational-renewal measures improved farm business performance, resilience, and secure transfers between generations. However, these measures emphasized enhancing the socio-economic sustainability of businesses after young farmers established their operations, rather than facilitating farm succession, and were less effective for off-family farm transfers.

The CAP 2023-2027 establishes a strengthened and more comprehensive support framework for young farmers, promoting employment, growth, and local development to attract young people to rural areas, improve working and living conditions, and reduce the exodus of rural youth.

Interventions for young farmers include:

- Direct Payments: EU countries must allocate at least 3% of their direct payments budget to support young farmers. This support can take the form of income support, investment assistance, or start-up aid. Additionally, EU countries can establish Complementary Income Support for Young Farmers (CISYF), which offers enhanced income support to newly established young farmers eligible for basic income support.
- Rural Development: (i) Support for the installation of young farmers, new farmers, and rural business start-ups; (ii) Cooperation schemes in the context of farm succession.

Beyond CAP funding, EU countries are also required to assess how national policies—such as tax relief schemes, farmers' pension programs, loan initiatives, and regulations on land leasing, purchasing, and inheritance—interact with CAP interventions. This ensures that national and CAP measures are aligned and mutually reinforcing, creating a cohesive framework that effectively addresses the needs of young farmers.

Box 1: Young farmer definition

The Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 on CAP Strategic Plans sets the minimum necessary common elements defining the criteria to qualify as “young farmer” at EU level. This definition includes the requirements for all relevant interventions under income support and rural development. This ensures consistency when EU countries address the objective of generational renewal in their CAP Strategic Plans.

Firstly, a young farmer must be a “farmer” as per the definition stipulated in Article 3(1) to Regulation (EU) 2021/2115. EU countries must take into consideration the following mandatory elements when drawing up their definition of a young famer as stipulated in Article 4(6) to Regulation (EU) 2021/2115:

- A young farmer can be maximum 35-40 years old (EU countries are to set the exact upper age limit).
- A young farmer must be a 'head of the holding' (i.e. must have an effective control over the holding, and EU countries must detail the specifications).
- A young farmer must have appropriate training and/or skills (EU countries must detail the specifications).



HOW CAN THE STRENGTHENING AKIS STRATEGIES CONTRIBUTE TO ACHIEVING GENERATIONAL RENEWAL?

Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) play a crucial role in modernizing the agricultural sector while contributing to generational renewal n agriculture.

AKIS interventions should be seen as a body of accompanying measures providing comprehensive support for young farmers. These measures range from building proper technical and entrepreneurial skills to enhancing functional and innovative capacities that boost not only the competitiveness of the agricultural sector but also drive its ecological transition. Furthermore, these interventions should facilitate young farmers' integration into a system of qualified relationships and horizontal networks among economic, territorial, and sectoral actors, fostering potential collaborations for entrepreneurial and territorial value chains.

Among the others some effective interventions might be the followings (list not exhaustive):

Generational renewal projects

These include project plan for installation of young farmers that must include other forms of support, by:

- Combining support for installation of your farmers with mentorship by older/experienced farmers and support for early retirement.
- Combining the support for installation of young farmers with training on global management and an advisory programme of 3 years.
- Combining the support for installation of young farmers with vouchers for the use of substitution services.

Cooperation for innovation

- Encourage the adhesion of young farmers in Operational Groups.
- Promote the installation of start-ups.

Training, discussion groups, peer-to-peer reviews, cross-visits and other forms of knowledge sharing

- Training programmes that engage young farmers in networks, discussion, groups, and other interactive peer-to-peer learning and networking experiences, by including more experienced farmers.
- Exchange programmes for young farmers.
- Study visits and participation to seminars and demofarms events.
- Mentorship and Knowledge Transfer: Advisory services foster mentorship relationships between experienced farmers and younger generations, facilitating the transfer of valuable insights, best practices, and local knowledge.
- Training on business farm management, marketing, sustainable farming practices, technology in agriculture, Crop and Livestock Management, soil and water management, Regulatory Compliance, and other key topics.
- Training on accessing CAP funding, grants, and incentives for sustainable practices and public goods.

Advisory and innovation support services:

- Specific advisory programs and tools for young farmers.
- Vouchers Coaching/Tutoring services.

Information access and sharing:

- Information on databases and platforms to match demand and offer of farms and of lands.

FIRST INSIGHTS FROM PRACTICES

The practices presented in this *Compendium* highlight various innovative approaches to leveraging the potential of AKIS interventions in supporting generational renewal within agriculture. These programs are aimed not only at future farmers but also at future agricultural advisors, addressing the need for both skilled practitioners and capable advisors to ensure the sector's sustainability.

- These initiatives focus on **knowledge transfer** and **capacity building,** providing young people with the necessary skills, knowledge, and networks to succeed. Programs like **internships**, **mentorship schemes**, and **specialized training** help bridge generational gaps and ensure the continuity of agricultural practices and advisory services. Particularly, in Spain, the **Rural Campus Program** focuses on promoting generational renewal through university internships in rural areas, providing young people with hands-on experience in farming and rural enterprises. In **Austria**, the **Next Generation – Farm Handover in Focus** program supports farm succession by addressing the legal, social, and economic challenges young farmers face when taking over farms, using targeted campaigns and mentorship. In **Estonia**, the **Generation Renewal of Agricultural Advisors** program provides training for new agricultural advisors, addressing the aging workforce and integrating new talent into the advisory sector through mentorship and specialized courses.

For future farmers, the emphasis is on practical training and exposure to real-world farming environments, alongside mentorship opportunities that facilitate **farm succession** and foster **entrepreneurial skills**. For future advisors, the focus is on providing **specialized knowledge, communication skills**, and **networking** opportunities to ensure effective advisory services, particularly in the face of an aging workforce.

FOOD FOR THINKING

Questions for opening the discussion and reflect on how to better direct AKIS interventions towards a skills development of young farmers, new entrants in agriculture and start-ups are:

Delivery:

- How to better organize coordination of national educational policies and schemes with CAP training?
- How to structure a call for Generational renewal projects applications?

SWOT & Needs Assessment:

- What specific skills do young farmers and new entrants feel are most critical for their success in today's agricultural landscape?

Training and Capacity Building

- How to establish (and advertise) a catalogue of relevant training courses, Mentorship programs, for a smooth access by potential users?
- How to facilitate the access study visits?

Monitoring and Evaluation

- How to structure and advertise a repository of demand and offer of farms/lands?

Advisory and innovation support services:

- How to facilitate the access to specialized high quality advisory programs, coaching/tutoring services for young farmers?

HOW TO FOLLOW-UP WITH THE RESULTS OF COLLECTION OF AKIS-IN-PRACTICE!

- The **collection of "AKIS-in-Practice"** must be expanded through continuous dialogue with partners to provide a broader scope of the different approaches that can contribute to achieving CAP specific objectives relating to generational renewal.
- **Workshops, informative and capacity building sessions within the CoPs** can be used to share and discuss on the effectiveness of approaches already put in practice and practical implications. These events might be directed to co-develop/adapt possibly innovative combinations of AKIS interventions with the CAP and national support to young farmers.
- Workshops on the E**U research and innovation projects** focusing on the specific topics to share knowledge and to put in use already delivered practical advisory/monitoring tools and guiding documents (e.g. policy briefs, interventions schemes, digital tools). Among the others, for example, some relevant projects are: Ruralization, COCOREADO, and other projects.

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- EC website.
- Preliminary study support for the EC on “The impact of the common agricultural policy on generational renewal, local development and jobs in rural areas”.

modernAKIS Together for Systems' Innovation

Support to generational renewal

AKIS-in-practice! 9.5

Generation Renewal of Agricultural Advisors in Estonia

Keywords/Tags

- Advisors training
- Peer-to-peer learning
- Study visits

Potential users

- Ministries responsible for agriculture and rural development
- Chambers of Agriculture and advisory services
- Educational institutions in the agricultural sector
- Coordination bodies for youth and regional development

RATIONALE

Estonian advisors operate as private enterprises as part of a mixed AKIS system that includes both publicly supported and private advice providers. Most of advisors are self-employed and do not work full-time. They have other duties, such as teaching or running their own businesses (e.g., bookkeeping), highlighting a diversified approach to their professional activities. The persons in the impartial advisory registry rely highly on the CAP support on advisory services. METK, Centre of Estonian Rural Research and Knowledge acts since 2023 as a back-office for all AKIS activities, including providing trainings and networking opportunities to private advisors.

SOLUTION

The "Nõustajate järelkasvu arendamise koolitusprogramm" (Training program for Generation Renewal of Agricultural Advisors 2024-2025) was planned to increase interest in agricultural advisory work. In essence, the program was a systemic effort to counteract the aging and potential decline of the advisory workforce by attracting and training new professionals, fostering mentorship, and integrating advisory services more deeply into the broader knowledge and innovation system of the rural economy.
Primary Problems Addressed:

Primary Problems Addressed:

- **Aging Advisor Workforce:** A significant portion (56% in 2022 and 61% in 2024) of active advisors were aged 50 and above, leading to concerns about the sustainability and continuity of advisory services as many approach retirement.
- **Lack of New Entrants:**There has been a modest interest from young people in pursuing careers as agricultural advisors, and systematic recruitment of new consultants has been lacking for the past two decades.
- **Insufficient Coverage:**The existing advisory service may not cover all necessary fields and specific directions of farming and food processing sectors.
- **Complexity of Development:**Forming new advisors is a complex process, as it requires considerable knowledge and diverse practical experience.

IN PRACTICE

The Training Program for new advisors was carried out from July 31, 2024, to July 31, 2025. The program was conducted as a response to public procurement under the RDP support, measure 01, knowledge transfer programme by METK, Centre of Estonian Rural Research and Knowledge.
The program aimed to increase the total number of advisors, ensure age integration for service sustainability, improve the availability and coverage of advisory services (including new areas), develop mentorship, foster positive image for advisory services, and facilitate the smooth integration of the AKIS, knowledge transfer and advisory services into the rural economy.

The actual trainings in the program ran from October 2024 to June 2025, providing participants with in-depth knowledge of advisory methodology, specialized topics in the field, and practical experience under the guidance of experienced mentors. In addition, study tours were organized both in Estonia and abroad, as well as group meetings that helped expand the network necessary for work. Participants in the training program acquired knowledge and skills that will allow them to apply for inclusion in the list of advisors and take the first steps as a professional. The program emphasized applying new knowledge and understanding directly into practice, with participants analyzing their internship experiences.

The program was based on three pillars:

1. LEARNING - advisory methodology and professional knowledge of the field, both in a group and individually;
2. INTERNSHIP - support from a personal supervisor/mentor;
3. NETWORKING - study trips in Estonia and abroad and group meetings that expand the network necessary for work.

Compulsory training modules: Advisory methodology (CECRA Modules 1, 2 and 16):

- Module 1 (My role as an advisor): motivation as an advisor, understanding the advisor's role, strengths and weaknesses, cultural sensitivity, target groups and basic concepts.
- Module 2 (Communication and building relationships in advisory work) focused on communication fundamentals, models, techniques (e.g., active listening, questioning), structuring professional advisory interviews, and handling objections.
- Module 16 (Interactive innovation) covered innovation processes, roles of participants, creativity techniques, and managing innovation in multi-actor groups

Specialized thematic training:

- Digital Skills in Rural Economy: Focused on precision farming, digital agriculture, data collection, management, and protection systems, and technological advancements.
- Agricultural Entrepreneurship: Explored business fundamentals, support systems, financing, business lifecycle, business model/plan development, market analysis, and financial management.
- Cooperatives in Agriculture: Explored different forms of cooperation, legal aspects, EU objectives for producer organizations, funding, and overcoming obstacles.
- Circular Bioeconomy: Discussed the potential of bio- and circular bioeconomy, technologies, sustainable solutions in agriculture, and waste management.
- Environmental Protection: Covered sustainable management, environmental protection requirements related to water, soil, biodiversity, air, and climate change mitigation.
- Specialty area training: Participants were encouraged to select courses relevant to their future advisory field, such as crop cultivation, organic farming, horticulture. Individual study allowed participants to take elective courses from universities or vocational centers, with costs compensated by METK (up to 6 EAP per participant), including courses offered abroad

Each participant was assigned a personal supervisor or mentor (experienced advisors, academics or entrepreneurs). Meetings were flexible in frequency, time, and location, tailored to individual needs.

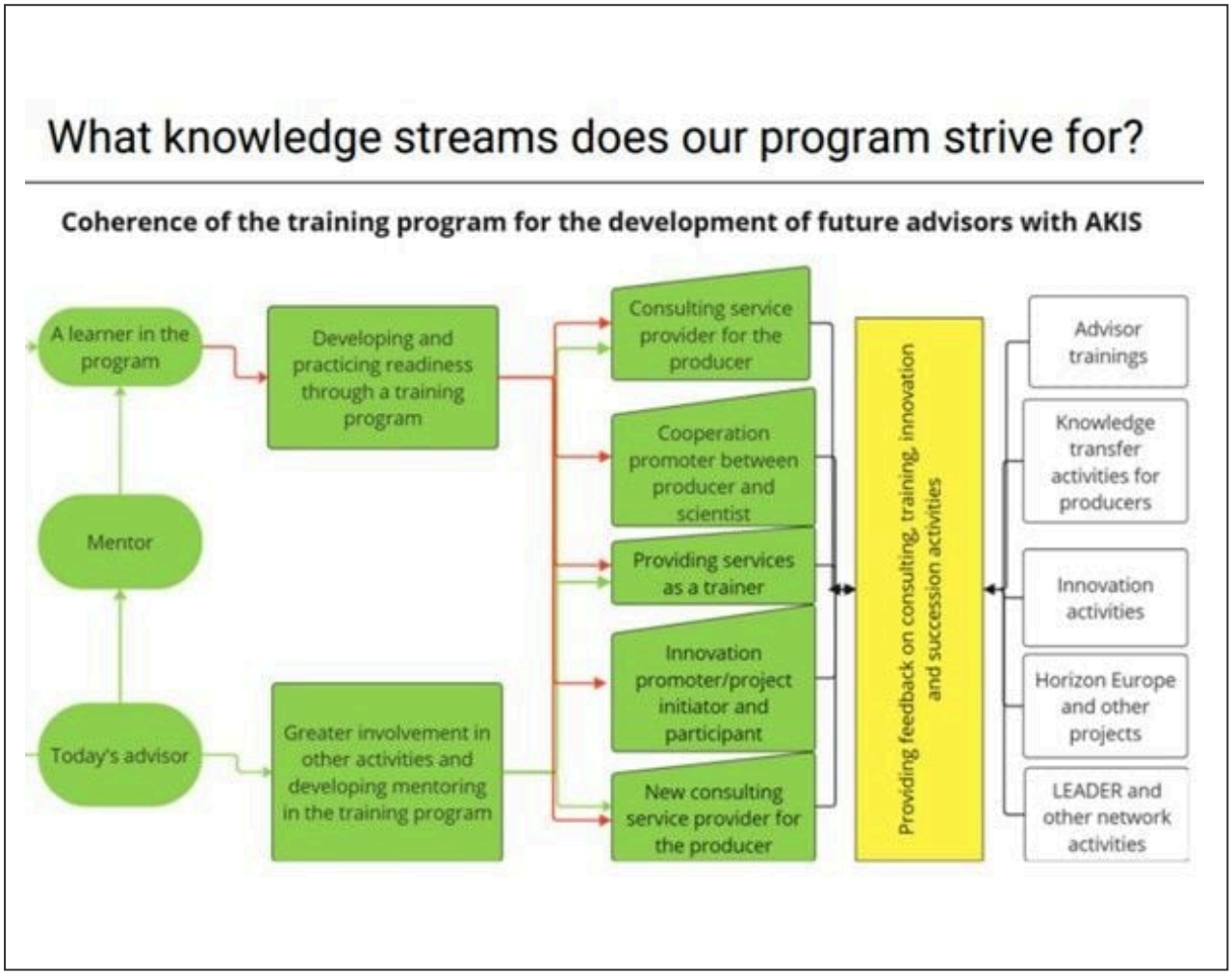
Compulsory practical training: advising at least five companies in cooperation with a supervisor/mentor. Minimum 20 working days over three consecutive calendar months, involving analysis of advisory needs and preparing a practice report. This also included familiarization with companies, supervisory authorities, R&D institutions, and professional associations. Limited opportunities for practice abroad were also available.

Supportive group meetings and study trips were offered for the participants.

- **Reflection Group Meetings**: Provided additional support for learners' practical knowledge development and connection between theory and practice, also discussing the advisory system and career path.
- **Covision Group Meetings:** For supervisors/mentors to share experiences, discuss challenges, and ensure consistent guidance.
- **Study Trip to Ireland for learners:** A 6-day trip to learn about the Irish advisory system, AKIS center, and visit innovative agricultural enterprises.
- **Study Trip to Denmark for mentors/supervisors:** A 5-day trip focused on experience sharing, innovation, digital solutions, and environmental technologies in Danish agriculture.
- **Domestic Study Trips**: Conducted as part of reflection group meetings in North and South Estonia to familiarize participants with the work of R&D institutions, professional associations, and producer organizations

As a final touch, all participants were required to submit a thesis, an independent work reflecting the participant's prior learning, work experience, studies, activities, and skill acquisition during the program. It was compiled based on the basis of advisors occupational standard and defended at a seminar. An optional opportunity for participants to take the Level 5 or 6 consultant occupational qualification exam with specialization; and the exam fee was compensated.

The program also produced and updated three publications: the handbook K.Jalak "Nõu andjast nõustajaks" (From giving advice to be an adviser), quick reference cards "Koosloome töövahendid" (Tools of Co-creation), and a translation of handbook by E.Wielinga, S. Robijn "Energising networks. Tools for co-creation".



PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR REPLICABILITY

The training program for new Advisors was considered a pilot project as the last active recruitment of new advisors was over 20 years ago. Since this was a pilot project, the training program will probably be replicated for the next generation after a certain number of years.

The program was drawn up in 2022, with the expectation of implementing it within at least 1.5 years. However, the contract was signed so late (2024) that the actual training took place in just 8 months. The program's intensive nature, encompassing significant contact hours, practical training, and independent study (estimated at 28% of participants' working hours), presented a substantial workload. This intensity made it challenging for participants to fully utilize optional individual study opportunities or undertake practice abroad, as many found it difficult to balance with their existing work and family commitments.

Insights and Tips for Replication/Adaptation:

- **Realistic workload communication:** Clearly communicate the intensive time commitment of the program to prospective participants to manage expectations and ensure commitment. Consider structuring the program to allow for more flexibility or modularity to ease the burden on working professionals.
- **Embrace and promote ecognition of prior learning:** Actively integrate and emphasize the VÕTA mechanism from the outset. It proved invaluable for providing flexibility and acknowledging participants' diverse educational and professional backgrounds, especially when program timelines do not perfectly align with traditional academic calendars.
- **Proactive and diverse mentor recruitment:** Develop a robust and proactive mentor recruitment strategy. Direct outreach, such as engaging presentations at professional seminars, can be highly effective in attracting experienced advisors.
- **Flexible mentor support allocation:** Implement a flexible system for mentor hours, allowing the amount of support to be tailored to individual learner needs, potentially reducing over-allocation of resources.
- **The CECRA training modules:** (M1; M2; M16) were favorites of the program learners, because the feedback % was excellent and the feedback on the content, trainers and applicability was very good.
- **Balance theory with practical application:** For specialized training modules, ensure a strong practical component and case-study approach to complement theoretical knowledge, directly addressing feedback about overly theoretical content.
- **Provide ongoing mentor support for newly active advisors** in their initial months and establish learning circles for continued peer-to-peer learning. Organize joint activities, such as vision conferences or common study trips, to foster integration and collaboration between new and existing advisors.
- **Integrate study trips into program core:** Utilize domestic study trips as a compulsory component of practical training. These reflection group meetings proved effective in familiarizing participants with relevant organizations (R&D institutions, professional associations, producers) and expanding their networks, while fulfilling practice requirements.
- **Incentivize Professional Certification:** Covering the cost of professional exams can be a significant motivator for participants to pursue formal certification, leading to a higher rate of qualified advisors.
- **Invest in Post-Program Integration and Ongoing Support:** To ensure long-term success and integration, allocate resources for continued support and networking opportunities after program completion:
- **Implement initiatives to enhance the positive public image of advisors**.

- **Invest in Post-Program Integration and Ongoing Support:** To ensure long-term success and integration, allocate resources for continued support and networking opportunities after program completion:
- Implement initiatives to enhance the positive public image of advisors.
- **Offer additional specialized training** (e.g., "Advisor as a trainer" or international project management) to equip new advisors for broader roles within the AKIS framework and in research projects.
- **Streamline expense reimbursement:** Simplify the process for claiming practical training expenses to encourage higher participation and reduce administrative burden for learners. Explore alternative, less bureaucratic methods for expense tracking.
- **Refine budgeting and flexibility:** Review and adjust budget estimations based on actual utilization rates, especially for optional components. Consider built-in flexibility to reallocate funds to activities that prove more impactful or necessary during implementation.
- **Consider accountability for program completion:** As suggested in the program's web information, implementing a clause that allows for proportional reimbursement of costs for unjustified withdrawals could encourage participants' commitment and accountability.

BENEFITS

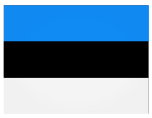
- The final beneficiaries of the project are agricultural and rural entrepreneurs. They now have 26 new advisors in ten main areas of advice and who are able to provide comprehensive advice to the company in various collaborations.
- Inspirational are the 43 people involved (including mentors), with different background, specialty and age, who are now full of energy network. METK coordinates AKIS implementation and now it has new advisors thatcan be involved in other AKIS activities (trainings, innovation projects, etc.).
- Simple basic theories (Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning and Malcolm S. Knowles "The Adult Learning Theory") works well, if you build up the program so that theory can be applied. The implementation of the principles of the AKIS should take place through network-based collaborative management, which provides an opportunity for creating social value, innovation, and solving complex problems where trust is most important aspect what acts like glue to support movement towards goals.
- Advisors are often competitors because they are private entrepreneurs in Estonia. Since the network created by the participants is valued, it can be hoped that in the future there will be more partners than competitors. The learners raised the issue of creating a representative organization for their advisors, which would be very welcome, as it would open up access to being a partner with legislators and improving the quality of advice.
- Each learner advised at least 5 companies, which means that we have over 100 companies more aware of the advisory service, and based on the cooperation that has been created, entrepreneurs are more confident in contacting and telling other entrepreneurs about the advisory service option.
- Young advisors are more likely to collaborate with research institutions so that in the future research results can be better applied in practice and the wishes of entrepreneurs can be better conveyed to research institutions. Many learners are entrepreneurs and belong to business representative organizations (e.g., the Young Farmers' Union), thus other entrepreneurs become more aware of the advisors, and advisors can also convey messages to politicians through representative organizations;

BENEFITS

- Youth engagement by providing educational opportunities and practical experience.
- Skill development tailored to the needs of the agricultural and rural sectors.
- Promotion of sustainable agricultural practices, encouraging participants to adopt new technologies and methods that can enhance productivity while minimizing environmental impact.
- Creation of networking opportunities among youth, local businesses, educational institutions, and agricultural organizations.

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- https://metk.agri.ee/noustajate-jarelkasvu-arendamise-koolitusprogramm
- https://metk.agri.ee/uudised/26-uut-noustajat-lopetas-edukalt-maaelu-teadmuskeskuse-jarelkasvuprogrammi
- https://metk.agri.ee/en/network-innovate-akis-nordic-baltic-space and https://youtu.be/Ro0ce2cgN30



Estonia

METK
Eve Külmallik
eve.kylmallik@metk.agri.e
METK
Hanna Tamsalu
hanna.tamsalu@metk.agri.ee

modernAKIS Together for Systems' Innovation

Support to generational renewal

AKIS-in-practice! 9.6

Next Generation- Farm Handover in Focus

Keywords/Tags

- Advisors training
- Peer-to-peer learning
- Innovation support services
- Knowledge exchange
- Knowledge flows

Potential users

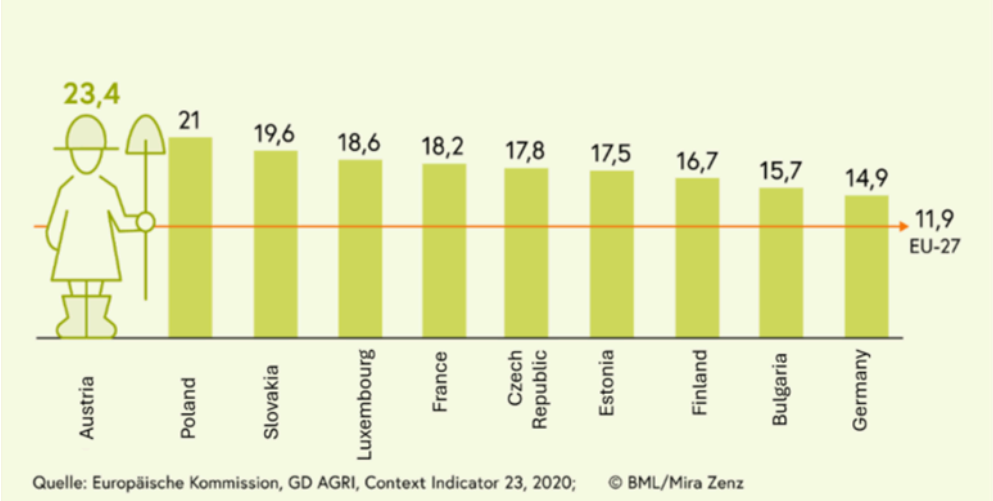
- Ministries responsible for agriculture and rural development
- Chambers of Agriculture and advisory services
- Educational institutions in the agricultural sector
- Coordination bodies for youth and regional development

RATIONALE

Austria's AKIS is characterized by close integration of educational, advisory, administrative, and practical actors. Landjugend Österreich, the largest youth organization in rural areas, plays a central role in non-formal education and youth development. With around 108,000 members, Landjugend Österreich is present in 60% of all Austrian municipalities and acts as a strong connector between young people, agriculture, and rural development.

In the context of Austria's AKIS, farm handover is a key issue, as it not only ensures the economic continuity of farms but also affects the stability of rural areas. While Austria's age structure in agriculture is relatively favorable – around 23.4% of farm holders are under 40 years old and therefore placing Austria well above the EU average of 11.9% – one third of farms face a generational transition, highlighting the urgency of preparing the next generation for takeover.

Figure 1: Farm holders under 40 in the EU - Top 10 in percent



Source of data: European Commission, DG AGRI, Context Indicator 23, 2020

However, even whit favorable demographics, farm handovers is a complex process with legal, social, and economic implications. In Austria, it often occurs early and within the family, supported by agricultural policy measures such as establishment grants or tax incentives for new farm managers. In 97–98% of cases, a handover takes place within the family. Nevertheless, uncertainties persist, especially among young people, regarding market conditions, bureaucracy, or family dynamics.

SOLUTION

The project "Next Generation – Farm Handover in Focus", led by Landjugend Österreich in cooperation with the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, directly addresses the complexity and uncertainty of farm handover and strengthens Austria's AKIS by complementing existing advisory and educational services with a targeted, modern communication campaign.
The project, which strongly emphasizes knowledge sharing and multi-actor collaboration, demonstrates how to effectively bridge policy, education, and practice. By involving stakeholders from across the system—including youth organizations, government, advisory bodies, media, and NGOs—it builds trust, fosters identification, and supports well-informed decisions about the future of farming.
The main aim of the project is closing information gaps, providing orientation, and improving both emotional and professional preparation for farm handover. It offers initial orientation and support but does not replace legal or substantive advice on handover, which is provided by specialized advisors in the federal Chambers of Agriculture.
A central motivation driving this initiative is to emotionally connect young people to agriculture and encourage them to take over a farm. The initiative is embedded in the CAP Strategic Plan and co-financed under the Rural Development Program. It complements existing AKIS structures through innovative communication formats and strengthens young people's access to existing support services.

IN PRACTICE

The project **"Next Generation – Farm Handover in Focus"** was financed through the Austrian Rural Development Program (RDP) 2014–2020, under Measure 1a – Knowledge Transfer and Information Actions in Agriculture and Forestry (Maßnahme 1a – Wissenstransfer und Informationsmaßnahmen in der Land- und Forstwirtschaft). This measure supported projects that aimed to improve the flow of knowledge within AKIS structures by funding the preparation and dissemination of information relevant to practitioners. The funding rate of this project was 80%. The total budget of the project was EUR 32,337, distributed as follows: EAFRD (€10,178), National/Regional funds (€10,412), Private/Own funds (€5,148), and other non-EU funding sources: € 6,599 (source: EU CAP Network). It was officially launched at a press conference hosted by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture. The Minister of Agriculture, the State Secretary for Youth, and the Chairwoman of Landjugend introduced the campaign to the public. It targets young people under 40 who are planning to take over a farm, as well as farm managers willing to transfer their holdings.

Key activities of the campaign included:

- **Campaign Launch:** The campaign initially featured a landing page, posters, and a sticker campaign — all developed by the Ministry and not funded through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).
- Sticker Campaign: A set of eye-catching stickers with playful and empowering slogans like “Ackerdemiker,” “Muuuhtig in die Zukunft,” and “Expertin in meinem Feld” (Austrian puns) was created to spark interest and promote a positive image of modern agriculture. These stickers were distributed to Landjugend members, who proudly displayed them in visible places. This activity was not CAP-funded.
- **Poster Series Featuring Young Farmers:** Four posters showcasing young role models in agriculture were developed to inspire their peers. The posters were widely distributed in agricultural schools and all chambers of agriculture across Austria. The same individuals also appeared in social media content—reels and co-posts published by the Ministry of Agriculture and Landjugend. This part of the campaign was also not funded through the CAP.
- Landing Page on CAP Support: To provide clear and accessible information about CAP funding opportunities for young farmers, the Ministry launched a central landing page. A printed leaflet summarizing the most important points was also distributed to schools and chambers. These materials were created outside the CAP funding framework.
- **Brochure on Family Farm Handovers:** A CAP-funded brochure was published to support farm handovers within families. It breaks down the legal, tax, and social aspects of a farm handover in a way that’s easy to understand. The brochure is illustrated with real-life photos of young farmers to make the content relatable and engaging.
- Brochure on Non-Family Handover Options: A second CAP-funded brochure explores handover options beyond the family, such as leasing or transferring a farm to someone outside the family. It offers practical guidance and explains the relevant legal and financial considerations in straightforward terms, encouraging openness to alternative solutions.
- **Interactive Video Brochure:** One of the project’s most innovative tools is an interactive video brochure (CAP-funded) available on the Landjugend website. Users can choose different information paths depending on their personal situation—whether they’re handing over a farm or taking one over. The video includes embedded PDFs for more in-depth information and offers barrier-free, low-threshold access to useful content.
- **Social Media Campaign:** A CAP-funded campaign featuring 51 short video reels was launched on social media. In these clips, young farm managers share authentic insights and hands-on advice about taking over a farm. The campaign highlights real experiences and peer learning, helping young farmers connect with the topic in a relatable way.

Implementation is carried out in close cooperation with the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Regions and Water Management (BMLUK), the Austrian Chamber of Agriculture, the association Perspektive Landwirtschaft, and the nine regional Landjugend organizations.
All activities funded under the CAP were carried out by Landjugend Österreich and included:

- The development and distribution of two topic-specific brochures (on family and non-family farm handovers).
- The creation of an interactive video brochure hosted on the Landjugend website.
- A comprehensive social media campaign with 51 short video reels featuring authentic voices of young farm managers.

Other project components—such as the press conference, poster and sticker campaigns, and the central landing page—were funded directly by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and were not CAP-financed. These activities complemented the CAP-funded elements and enhanced the campaign's reach and visibility.
Although the project was implemented during the 2014–2020 CAP funding period, its thematic focus aligns directly with priorities in the current CAP Strategic Plan 2023–2027. Specifically, it contributes to:

- Specific Objective 7 (SO7): Generational Renewal, by motivating young people to take over farms and supporting them with relevant, accessible knowledge.
- Priority 1: Knowledge Transfer and Innovation, through its focus on low-threshold, digital, and youth-oriented communication tools.

The project showcases how a targeted intervention under Measure 1a can strengthen AKIS functionality—particularly through co-creation with young farmers, stakeholder collaboration, and strategic use of CAP instruments.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR REPLICABILITY

The project offers valuable lessons and a practical model for other regions or countries looking to support generational renewal in agriculture through AKIS-based approaches. Its structure and execution reveal several key considerations for those interested in adapting or replicating the initiative.

To successfully carry out a similar project, several basic requirements should be in place.

- First, a capable organization with strong connections to rural youth is essential. In Austria, this role was filled by Landjugend Österreich, a large and well-respected youth organization with a nationwide presence. Other countries would need a similarly trusted institution to engage young farmers effectively. Access to appropriate funding is also critical.
- This project was largely financed through Austria's Rural Development Program 2014–2020 under Measure 1a, which supports knowledge transfer and information actions. With an 80% funding rate, this measure made it possible to produce professional, accessible materials and reach a wide audience.
- The project also relied on strong partnerships with the Ministry of Agriculture, advisory services, NGOs, and educational institutions to ensure both reach and credibility.

The project's effectiveness was rooted in several success factors:

- It was entirely youth-led, with young people involved from the earliest planning stages through to implementation. This ensured that all content was relevant, relatable, and engaging.
- The project used low-barrier formats—such as short social media reels and interactive video brochures—that made complex information easy to understand. Featuring real young farmers as role models also helped build trust and emotional connection.
- National media visibility and collaboration with regional Landjugend groups helped adapt the campaign to different local contexts.

For others planning a similar initiative, some clear recommendations stand out:

- Involve young people directly in developing content.
- Combine printed materials with digital media to reach broader audiences.
- Tailored messages to reflect different farm types and regional realities.
- Build partnerships with policy makers, advisors, and educators to anchor efforts within existing AKIS structures.
- Plan a strong outreach strategy that combines both social media and on-the-ground communication.

There are also some challenges to keep in mind. Coordinating funding from different sources, such as CAP and national programs, can be complex. Communicating technical information in a way that feels authentic and approachable requires careful messaging. Supporting both the emotional and practical sides of farm handovers calls for sensitivity and clarity. Ensuring equal access in rural and remote areas means one will need strong local networks. And digital tools like websites and video platforms will need to be maintained and updated as policy and funding opportunities evolve

BENEFITS

- Strengthening young people's access to existing AKIS structures.
- Reducing information barriers through clear, target-group-oriented content.
- Promoting emotional identification with the role of farm holders.
- Supporting both generations in structured, low-conflict farm handover.
- Securing family farms and regional value creation.
- Increasing public visibility of farm handover.
- Enhancing societal appreciation for the contributions of young farmers.

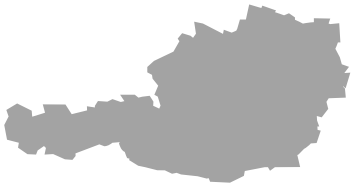
FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- Hofübergabe & Hofübernahme.
- Österreichs Land- & Forstwirtschaft - Hofübernahme im Fokus.
- Interactive brochure.
- Homepage of Federal Mi.

Austria

@

Bundesgeschäftsführer Landjugend Österreich:
Tobias Lang
tobias.lang@landjugend.at



modernAKIS Together for Systems' Innovation

Support to generational renewal

Get-inspired4AKIS! 9.7

Rural Campus Program: Bridging Generations and Knowledge Through Rural Internships

Keywords/Tags

- Internship
- Knowledge Exchange
- Generational Renewal,
- Advisors
- Students

Potential users

- Managing authorities of the CAP strategic Plans
- Universities and their students
- Trainers and trainees
- Rural companies and institutions
- Advisors
- Farmers, foresters and other rural actors

RATIONALE

Rural environments constitute 84% of Spain's surface area, yet they are home to only 15.7% of the Spanish population. Furthermore, almost 75% of Spanish municipalities house fewer than 5,000 inhabitants each.

Compounding this situation, the rural population has decreased by 4.4% over the last ten years, with young people being the most negatively affected by this trend.

In light of this situation, maintaining territorial and social cohesion in our country must be a priority for public policies, aiming to transform and promote economic, technological, and social development in both rural and urban environments.

This demographic challenge has a direct and critical consequence on the agricultural sector, particularly regarding generational renewal. The progressive outflow and low presence of young people accelerate the aging of the farming population, creating significant barriers to innovation and the adoption of more sustainable and modern practices. Addressing this structural problem is essential to ensure the continuity and resilience of Spanish agriculture, which is a core objective of the AKIS and Farm to Fork strategies.

The Spanish Government promotes initiatives to ensure the dynamization of rural areas is a priority, with the aim of reducing the differences between villages and towns.

SOLUTION

The Rural Campus Program, promoted by the Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge (MITECO) in cooperation with 44 Spanish universities, is a public initiative designed to directly address the challenge of generational renewal and to foster the social and economic development of agricultural and rural areas. Moreover, the initiative has also the purpose of contributing to the territorial rebalancing, taking young people with new ideas and knowledge into small villages and rural areas with the aim of dynamize them.

The program enables the development of compulsory university internships in rural areas with the explicit aim of transforming and enabling these environments into places of social and economic development for the younger generation.

The initiative pursues territorial rebalancing by actively injecting young people with new ideas and knowledge into small villages and rural areas, where the youth population is in sharp decline. This approach is crucial for generational renewal, as it focuses on:

- Creating New Perspectives: University students not only complete their studies in these areas but also live there, gaining a deep understanding of local specificities and participating directly with inhabitants. As a result, young people can see these places from a different perspective, evaluating them as a viable option for developing their personal and professional future.
- Knowledge Transfer (Youth to Elder): Farms, rural enterprises, institutions, and associations gain access to trained young talent, leveraging their fresh knowledge and new perspectives to modernize their activities and facilitate succession planning or skill transfer.

Essentially, the program acts as a generational and knowledge bridge, actively inserting the next generation of qualified professionals into communities at risk of depopulation. Since its implementation in 2022, the initiative has yielded satisfactory results, making it a benchmark practice at national and European levels for tackling the demographic crisis and ensuring operational continuity (including agriculture) in rural areas.

Campus Rural

IN PRACTICE

From May to November of 2025, students from every university degree have the possibility of developing their compulsory internship through the "Rural Campus" program.

- **Host Criteria:** Farms, enterprises, associations, and institutions located in towns with less than 5,000 inhabitants can participate in this initiative, receiving university students for periods of two to five months.
- **Direct Incentives:** Each student receives 1,000 euros per month. Furthermore, there is no cost for the hosting institution/enterprise to participate in the program, maximizing the attractiveness for farms and rural entities seeking an infusion of new skills and labour. There are 750 allocations available for students of 44 different public Spanish universities.
- **Long-Term Goal:** The program consists of connecting young talent with local areas, through internships and mentoring activities developed in areas subject to the risks of depopulation, aging, and territorial inequality, thereby creating new opportunities for economic and social development. The desired outcome is that young people choose these areas as the place to develop their careers, promoting the replacement of aging residents and qualified professionals.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR REPLICABILITY

- Establish two interconnected networks simultaneously: a robust network of universities and a formal host framework of farmers, rural companies, and institutions (Host Network).
- Define a clear path for mentoring to ensure structured guidance for students and maximize mutual knowledge transfer between generations.
- Secure project leadership from a public university (for academic quality and scholarship management) and strategic coordination from a relevant Ministry (e.g., Agriculture) for policy alignment.
- The entire solution can be efficiently replicated and scaled through initiatives of the CAP Network (Rete PAC), leveraging its existing infrastructure for needs identification and best practice dissemination.

BENEFITS

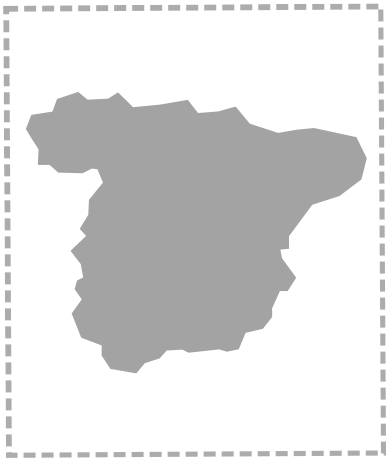
- Dynamization of rural areas.
- Energizing students' networks.
- Boosting new links between young students and farms in rural areas.
- Promoting knowledge exchange.
- Facilitating networking.
- Peer-to-peer learning.
- Creating new vocations for advisors.

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- Campus Rural Programme: https://www.miteco.gob.es/es/reto-demografico/campus_rural.html
- Debate about Campus Rural Programa. Youtube video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eTWgp-G09ug
- Recommendations and guidelines: https://www.miteco.gob.es/content/dam/miteco/es/reto-demografico/campus-rural/Campus%20Rural%20-%20gu%C3%ADa%20general%20de%20recomendaciones%202025.pdf
- List of universities involved in the Programme: https://www.miteco.gob.es/content/dam/miteco/es/reto-demografico/campus-rural/20250228_UNIVERSIDADES%20PARTICIPANTES%20CAMPUS%20RURAL%202025.pdf

Spain

General Secretariat for the Demographic Challenge:
Bzn-campus-rural@miteco.es
Contact CRUE Spanish Universities:
campusrural@crue.org.
Carmen Gil Gómez (MAPA):
cggomez@mapa.es
Juan Pedro Romero Trueba (MAPA):
jpromero@mapa.es



modernAKIS Together for Systems' Innovation

Theme 10

Improve the position of farmers in the food chain

Keywords/Tags

- Value chain
- F2F
- Trading practices
- Market
- Consumer
- Farmer

RATIONALE

The EU's food value chains are diverse and dynamic, designed to meet consumer expectations while enabling producers to add value.

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), through the Farm to Fork (F2F) strategy, specifically addresses power imbalances and promotes the inclusion of vulnerable participants in the EU food system by emphasizing the role of farmers in value chains (Specific Objective 3). This is achieved by promoting cooperation, supporting market-oriented production models, encouraging research and innovation, improving market transparency, and tackling unfair trading practices (UTPs).

On this regard, the Directive (EU) 2019/633 of the European Parliament and of the Council established fair trading practices in the agricultural and food supply chain, by highlighting some key points (box 1).

Box 1: Directive (EU) 2019/633 of the European Parliament and of the Council

- Scope: It applies to a wide range of operators in the agricultural and food supply chain, including producers, processors, and retailers, ensuring a level playing field.
- Unfair Trading Practices (UTPs): The directive focuses on preventing unfair trading practices that disproportionately affect small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), particularly farmers. This includes practices such as late payments, unilateral contract changes, and other exploitative behaviors.
- Protection of Farmers: By addressing UTPs, the directive seeks to strengthen the position of farmers in the supply chain, enabling them to negotiate fairer terms and receive more equitable compensation for their products.
- Encouraging Cooperation: The directive promotes cooperation among farmers and other supply chain actors, aiming to enhance their bargaining power and overall market position.
- Sustainability and Equity: By fostering fairer trading conditions, the directive contributes to the broader goals of sustainability and equity within the EU food system.
- Implementation: EU Member States are required to transpose the directive into national law, establishing legal frameworks that protect against unfair practices in their respective agricultural sectors.

Reporting Mechanisms: The directive requires Member States to establish national authorities responsible for monitoring compliance with the rules and handling complaints related to UTPs.

CAP reforms have strengthened the market orientation of agricultural production and improved the competitiveness of European producers. This has led to innovations along the supply chain, including product, process, and organizational changes driven by emerging technologies and evolving consumer demand. However, despite the EU agri-food sector's competitive edge in global markets and its leadership in variety and quality, farmers are less experiencing growth in their share of added value within the supply chain.

In fact, significant power imbalances persist, particularly disadvantaging producers who struggle to negotiate fair prices set by processors and distributors.

This issue is prevalent throughout the agri-food sector but varies in intensity and impact on the primary sector and across different supply chains and their stages, due to several factors: the type of product, its connections to the local territory, and the geographical scope of the value chains—whether local or more extensive (supra-regional or supranational). Additionally, dynamics with other territories and supply chains, including non-agricultural sectors like tourism, also play a role. Furthermore, relationships within value chains are increasingly shaped by access to natural resources and the effects of climate change.

In this context, the multitude of initiatives rethinking production chains from the perspective of food systems and the attachment of identity to territories has increased awareness of the crucial roles and functions of farmers in ensuring healthy and nutritious food. This has led to greater sensitivity regarding the compensation and income that farmers deserve for their resilience and enhanced competitiveness within the food production value chain. In this regard, it may be beneficial to draw on the results and tools from various R&I projects focused on food policies (e.g., the Food 2030 Project Family).

As it was highlighted by the EC the challenges and weaknesses of agrifood systems in Europe include:

- Power imbalance along the different stages of the value chains, mainly due to: (1) bargaining power asymmetries; (2) limited downstream expansion; (3) asymmetric price transmission along the chains; (4) high concentration of power in a few large players in processing, distribution, and retail that account significant rates on sales; (5) input market consolidation raises concerns about prices, innovation, and choices for farmers, leading to declining value share in the food supply chain due to rising costs and market power imbalances.

- Responsiveness to changing consumer preferences, mainly due to: (1) major sensitivity to nutritional quality and security of food; (2) major market orientation and attunement to consumer expectations (e.g. Tasty and affordable, High quality and healthy, climate and environmentally friendly, ethically produced); (3) health challenges relating to over-nutrition and obesity; (4) internal market changes based on evolving consumption patterns that create opportunities for improving farm economics, particularly related to the bio-economy and green and circular economies; (5) variety on how agriculture responds to consumer needs due to the different value chain pressures along the different stages.
- Low Concentration compared to other sectors, including rapidly evolving upstream input markets, hindering efficiency and bargaining power: (1) fragmentation of the primary sector combined with insufficient vertical integration within the primary sector and limiting control over the supply chain; (2) insufficient cooperation, still largely caused by lack of trust and perceptions of competition among farmers, insufficient awareness of the benefits of producer organizations (POs), individualisms over production and investment decisions, historical and cultural factors; (3) low structural changes in farming sectors against the faster evolutions of others.

Besides, positive developments in power balancing along supply chains are emerging from the connections between short value chains and zero-kilometer markets. Key benefits include:

1. **Direct Market Access:** Farmers can negotiate better prices and retain more value by selling directly to consumers, reducing reliance on intermediaries.
2. **Enhanced Bargaining Power:** Direct communication with consumers provides insights into preferences, informing production decisions.
3. **Stronger Relationships:** Closer ties between farmers and consumers foster trust and loyalty, leading to more stable demand and better market conditions.
4. **Transparency and Fair Pricing:** Improved understanding of market dynamics enables farmers to advocate for fairer prices and conditions.
5. **Community Support:** Local sourcing in short value chains generates community support, enhancing farmers' influence in decision-making processes.
6. **Adaptability and Resilience:** Farmers can quickly respond to changes in consumer preferences and market conditions, allowing for effective adaptation and diversification.
7. **Sustainable Practices:** Participation in short value chains motivates farmers to adopt sustainable practices, boosting their reputation and marketability as consumers increasingly value environmental and ethical considerations.

All these aspects highlight the fact that agricultural value chains in Europe are characterized by increasing complexity, which needs to be addressed more effectively by rebalancing the power of farmers at different stages. Pursuing this specific CAP objective must include a system-oriented approach that considers the multitude of interconnected socio-economic and environmental dynamics. This encompasses internal relationships within supply chains at various stages, as well as external relationships with territories and other supply chains, along with their respective internal power dynamics and modes of cooperation (e.g., with non-agricultural sectors). Additionally, connections to natural resources and climate change impact farmers' access to biological resources, while demographic changes drive shifts in the local labour market and consumer demands



HOW CAN STRENGTHENING AKIS STRATEGIES CONTRIBUTE TO ACHIEVING A BETTER POSITIONING OF FARMERS IN THE VALUE CHAIN?

The AKIS approach can more effectively navigate the growing complexity and dynamism of agricultural value chains by introducing a holistic vision for their balanced, resilient, and sustainable development. This should bring creating an enabling environment that empowers farmers at all stages of the value chain, through increasing major sensitivity and collective awareness along with developing more appropriate capacities towards more equitable income generation.

In general, it may be very appropriate to mainstream AKIS interventions within the initiatives of territorial partnerships and governance entities that focus on the development and transformation of local systems. Examples include local action groups (LAGs), food districts, bio-districts, integrated supply chain initiatives, and former producer organizations. Moreover, requiring a more integrated and comprehensive project design that combines productive and non-productive investments with AKIS-related interventions is likely to lead to more market-oriented approaches and equitable development of supply chains.

More specific ways to collectively empower farmers, enhancing their productivity, market access, and overall position in the agricultural value chain include:

Training

- Enhancing capacities of farmers on negotiation skills, market dynamics, and sustainable practices to improve bargaining power and align with consumer demand for eco-friendly products.
- Enhancing capacities of farmers on business models that connect producers directly to consumers.
- Providing training in financial literacy, compliance with food safety regulations, and entrepreneurship to support farmers' transition to commercial farming.

Cooperation for innovation:

- Strengthening the cooperation for innovation interventions by producer organizations, to address problems of the specific value chain and enabling collective bargaining and joint ventures for processing and distribution.
- Encourage collaborative research to develop products that meet consumer expectations and build networks for sharing successful practices.
- Combining local development initiative and territorial/farm identity with more sectorial and value chain-oriented interventions leading to major closeness to consumers and quality food.
- Promoting the inclusion of consumers within OGs.
- Promoting the development of protocols and business models that are tailored upon the specific local value chains.
- Promoting cooperation for innovative governance and partnership models that connect consumers and producers along sustainable oriented supply chains.

Advisory and innovation support services:

- Offer tailored advice on vertical integration, fair pricing mechanisms, and market intelligence to help farmers adjust production and enhance their negotiating power.
- Provide guidance on branding and marketing to highlight quality and ethical practices.

Information access and sharing:

- Improve farmers' understanding of market dynamics, aiding risk management and resilience against environmental changes.
- Disseminate data on consumer preferences and market trends to empower farmers in decision-making and enhance productivity.
- Promote transparency in pricing and share success stories to build trust and responsiveness among stakeholders.

FIRST INSIGHTS FROM PRACTICES

The practices presented in this Compendium highlight various approaches to enhancing farmers' roles within short food supply chains (SFSCs) and improving their integration into value-added agriculture. The **Polish practice** focuses on **practical training** for farmers and advisors, empowering them with the knowledge to engage in small-scale processing and direct sales, which helps them diversify their income and strengthen their market position. The **Hungarian practice** aims to build the capacity of **SFSC facilitators and mentors**, providing them with the skills necessary to guide small-scale producers through the complexities of direct marketing, legal frameworks, and operational management. The **Italian practice from the Abruzzo Region** promotes **cooperation among agri-food actors** through **Macro-Supply Chain Projects**, fostering innovation and enhancing competitiveness by creating partnerships that improve value chain integration, product quality, and regional branding. All these practices underscore the importance of **practical knowledge transfer**, **peer-to-peer learning**, and **cooperation**, which are essential for empowering farmers and ensuring the long-term sustainability of their businesses.

FOOD FOR THINKING

In this perspective, we could raise a few questions (not exhaustive) to help us reflect on how to better direct AKIS interventions towards the achievement of objective 3 of the CAP:

- How to organize an extension service on unfair trading practices and ensure prompt monitoring and information for farmers?
- How to better intercept, by AKIS visioning and interventions, food systems at the very last stages of agrifood value chains?
- Which roles and functions can advisors play and by which specific competences and skills?
- Which advisory expertise and tools are already in place to support farmers dealing with bargaining powers within the supply chains?
- How to plan integrated approaches and AKIS mainstreaming along the supply chains?

HOW TO FOLLOW-UP WITH THE RESULTS OF COLLECTION OF AKIS-IN-PRACTICE!

- The **collection of "AKIS-in-Practice"**must be expanded through continuous dialogue with partners to provide a broader scope of the different approaches that can contribute to achieving CAP Objective 3.
- A specific **networking** activity with other EU research and innovation projects that are focused on topics relating to the better position of farmers/producers within the value chain should bring to increase awareness and share knowledge and to put in use of already delivered practical tools and guiding documents (e.g. policy briefs, interventions schemes). Among the others, for example, some relevant projects are: SKIN, agroBRIDGES and the other SISTERS HORIZON projects, Corenet, SMARTCHAIN, FUSILLI and all the Food 2030 Project Family,
- **Joint workshops with the CoP** smight be directed to increase familiarity and to co-develop possibly innovative and major focused combinations of AKIS and non-AKIS interventions that can help achieve more effectively objective 3 of the CAP.

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- EC (2018) Policy brief CAP objective 3 – Improve imbalances in the food chain
- EC (2018) Full report: Improving market outcomes – enhancing the position of farmers in the supply chain.
- OECD/FAO (2016), OECD-FAO Guidance for Responsible Agricultural Supply Chains, OECD Publishing, Paris. http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264251052-en
- AgriResearch factsheet on sustainable, circular and innovative value chains
- EC website section on Food supply and food security
- EC website section on Food supply and security dashboard.

modernAKIS Together for Systems' Innovation

Supply chains

AKIS-in-Practice! 10.4

Macro-supply chain projects in Abruzzo Region

Keywords/Tags

- Peer-to-peer learning
- Cooperation
- Dissemination

Potential users

- Managing Authorities and policymakers
- Agri-food processors and distributors
- Advisory services
- Farmers and cooperatives
- Researchers
- AKIS coordination bodies

RATIONALE

The agricultural and rural system in the Abruzzo region faces several challenges, including the small size of farms, which hinders investments in research and development (R&D). Limited cooperation among farmers and other actors, combined with significant fragmentation, makes it difficult to spread innovation and manage production processes collectively. Additionally, the level of aggregation within and between different supply chains is insufficient to adequately address the challenges of the national and international markets.

These issues limit the competitiveness and sustainability of the regional agricultural, food, and forestry sectors. There was a need for an intervention to promote aggregation among sector stakeholders, encouraging collaboration for the adoption of new technologies, sustainable practices, and improving environmental and productivity outcomes, thus responding to the strategic priorities for rural development in the region.

SOLUTION

The Macro-Supply Chain Projects (Progetti di Macrofiliera) offered a structured cooperation model that encouraged the creation of partnerships among different agri-food actors. These partnerships promoted innovation, sustainable production, and efficient market organization through coordinated value chain actions.

The projects involved the development of cooperation strategies and project design, and the implementation of concrete actions to strengthen value chains. These actions included investments in product innovation, quality improvement, logistics, and regional branding.

Financial support was provided through the Rural Development Programme 2014–2022 (Measures 16.2, 4.1.1, 4.2.1, 1.2), co-financed by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and national funds.

Funding covered project coordination, research collaboration, and dissemination activities. Each project involved a lead partner responsible for managing implementation and ensuring that small-scale farmers and enterprises benefit directly from cooperation outcomes.

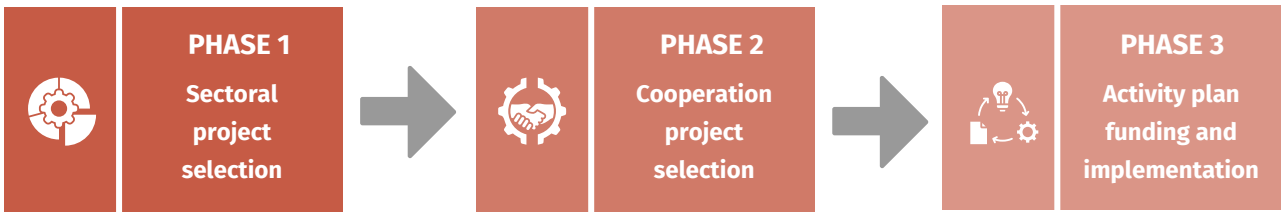
IN PRACTICE

The Macro-Supply Chain Projects brought together diverse actors across the agri-food system —farmers, cooperatives, processors, research institutions, advisory bodies, and regional authorities — to jointly design and implement strategies that strengthen competitiveness, traceability, and sustainability. The projects focused on strategic sectors such as dairy, cereals, olive oil, and wine, supporting collective marketing efforts and product valorisation through geographical indications and regional branding to enhance the visibility and value of local production.

To participate, interested groups applied through a regional public call under Measure 16.2, followed by Measures 4.1.1 and 4.2.1 and Measure 1.2 of the Rural Development Programme (RDP). The application process was competitive, requiring detailed partnership proposals that demonstrated clear cooperation mechanisms, innovation potential, and expected benefits for the agri-food value chain (Tables 1 & 2). Each proposal outlined objectives, expected results, and planned actions, and was evaluated based on its alignment with RDP priorities. Approved projects received funding through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD).

The initiative unfolded in three progressive phases, moving from partnership formation to innovation design and practical implementation (figure 1).

Figure 1. Phases of the Macro-Supply Chain Project Initiative



Phase 1 – Sectoral Project Selection

The first step focused on identifying *sectoral value chain projects* promoted by a *Lead Partner* and supported by a signed *Supply Chain Agreement.*

This preliminary selection did not provide direct funding under the RDP measures. Instead, it aimed to stimulate aggregation and collaboration among territorial and sectoral actors around shared innovation priorities and to raise early awareness of cooperation dynamics under Sub-measure 16.2 (Support for pilot projects and development of new products, practices, processes and technologies).

The beneficiaries of the measure were partnerships comprising multiple agricultural businesses and other stakeholders from the supply chain (such as agri-food companies, producer associations, cooperatives, interprofessional organizations, and research bodies including universities). These partnerships were organized as temporary business associations, network contracts, consortia, cooperatives, temporary purpose associations, or other legally recognized forms. The promoting entity/macro-sector partnership must consist of at least two direct participants, with mandatory inclusion of actors from the agricultural and/or agri-food sectors. Moreover, at least half of the participating agricultural and/or forestry businesses were required to have an operational presence in the regional territory.

Table 1. Selection criteria - PHASE 1

Criteria	Maximum Score	Description of the criteria
Partnership size	10	10: in case of >15 farms involved
		5: Number of farms ranging from 5 to 15
		0: Number of farms <5
Partnership composition	10	10: Presence of research and/or experimental organizations and/or universities in the partnership
		0: absence of the requirement
Number of stages of the supply chain involved in the partnership (agricultural production, processing, trade/distribution)	15	15: The project involves all three stages of the supply chain (agricultural production, processing, trade/distribution)
		7.5: The project involves two of the three stages of the supply chain
		0: The project involves fewer than two stages of the supply chain
Adoption of traceability systems for production across all stages of the supply chain	15	15: All products in the supply chain are traced through all stages of the supply chain
		10: at least 50% of the products in the supply chain are traced through all stages of the supply chain
		0: less than 50% of the products in the supply chain are traced through all stages
Project Quality - Consistency of the project proposal with transversal objectives	15	15: The project accumulates no fewer than 5 objectives, as outlined in the Measure 4
		10: the project accumulates no fewer than 3 objectives specified in the Measure
		0: absence of the requirement
Project Quality - Structure and project quality	15	15: The project is consistent with the analysis of identified needs (at least 3 sub-measures activated)
		7.5: The project is consistent with the analysis of identified needs (at least 2 sub-measures activated)
		0: Cases different from the previous ones
Quantity of raw material in the supply chain agreement	20	20: 80% of the origin from farms participating in the agreement
		0: Less than 40% of the origin from farms participating in the agreement

Phase 2 – Cooperation Projects selection ("Package" Approach)

The second phase introduced the implementation call under **Sub-measure 16.2 – Cooperation for innovation**, designed as an *integrated "package" intervention*. This phase enabled coordinated activation of the following complementary measures:

- **Measure 4.1 – Support for investments in agricultural holdings,**
- **Measure 4.2 – Support for investments in processing, marketing and/or development of agricultural products,**
- **Measure 1.2 – Support for vocational training, skills acquisition, and information actions.**

The call selected *Cooperation Projects* focused on **pilot initiatives and the development of new products, practices, processes, and technologies**, through an *Activity Plan* outlining both **investment needs** and **training/demonstration activities** to be carried out under the associated measures.

Table 2. Selection criteria PHASE 2

Criteria	Maximum Score	Evaluation of selection criteria
Articulation and design quality: innovation profiles within integrated supply chain projects	10	100% of the project is produced by companies that adhere to supply chain agreement for the creation of new commercial outlets through the development of new products and/or new processes and/or new technologies and/or innovative systems
		0% cases different from the previous ones
Articulation and design quality: profiles of replicability of results	5	100% of the project is accompanied by a technical analysis that highlights the possibility of replicating it in a variety of agricultural companies
		0% absence of the requirement
Completeness and relevance of partnerships	15	100% of the project is produced by companies that adhere to a macro-supply chain agreement positively evaluated following the first phase of selection of macro-supply chain projects
		0% absence of the requirement
Partnership expertise	10	100% of the cooperation project makes use of an organization structure equipped with competent experts in topics relating to each of the phases of the supply chain involved, with at least 5 years of professional experience
		0% absence of the requirement
Project alignment with sectoral and inter-sectoral priorities	10	100% of the project combines, in a measure of no less than 5, objectives indicated in the synoptic table "Agricultural enterprises/Productive sectors", referred to in the general sheet of Measure 4
		50% of the project combines, to a minimum of 3, objectives indicated in the "Agricultural enterprises/Productive sectors" summary table and in the "Agro-industrial supply chain/Productive sectors" summary table, as per the general sheet of Measure 4
		0% absence of the requirement
Alignment of the project with the analysis and general strategy of the PSR	20	The project is 100% produced by companies that adhere to a macro-supply chain agreement that develops cumulative production investments exceeding 5 million euros, of which over 60% are under Measure 4
		50% of the project is produced by companies that adhere to a macro-supply chain agreement that develops cumulative production investments exceeding 2.5 million euros, of which over 30% is under Measure 4
		25% of the project is produced by companies that adhere to a macro-supply chain agreement that develops cumulative production investments exceeding 1.00 million euros, of which over 30% is under Measure 4
		0% cases different from the previous ones

Impact of the project in terms of the number of stages of the supply chain involved (agricultural production, processing, trade/distribution)	15	The project involves 100% of the 3 phases of the supply chain (agricultural production, processing, trade/distribution), developing investment expenditure of 4% in each of them
		50% of the project involves at least 2 of the 3 phases of the supply chain, developing investment expenditure of 4% in each of them
		0% cases different from the previous ones
Impact of the project in terms of transversality of results	5	100% of the project highlights both operational solutions applicable to multiple production sectors
		0% absence of the requirement
Quality of the actions of dissemination of results	10	100% of the project includes at least 3 events, 1 of which is national, the activation of a dedicated web portal, its updating for the entire duration of the project, the commitment to keep its contents online for at least five years, the development of applications
		50% of the project includes at least two regional events, the activation of a dedicated web portal, its updating throughout the project, and a commitment to maintaining its content online for at least five years;
		0 cases other than the previous ones

Phase 3 – Multi-Measure Call

In the final phase, a *multi-measure* call activated again **Measures 1.2, 4.1, and 4.2**, in order to finance the concrete actions defined in the *Activity Plans* of the cooperation projects selected under **Measure 16.2.**

Funding applications were submitted by the partners directly involved in these cooperation projects, ensuring strong alignment between **innovation design (under 16.2)** and **on-farm and processing investments (under 4.1–4.2)**, complemented by **demonstration activities (under 1.2)**.

Of the seven support applications received, six were approved, but four were subsequently revoked.

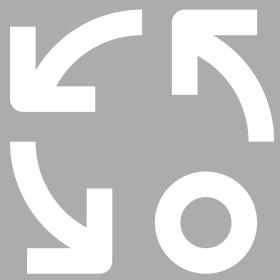
PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR REPLICABILITY

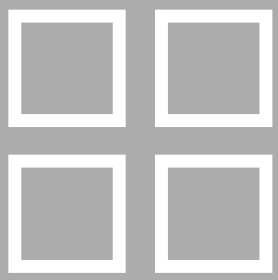
To replicate the Macro-Supply Chain model, end users should consider several practical aspects:

- **Administrative framework:** Requires a clear legal and policy foundation, ideally integrated into a regional or national strategy for agri-food competitiveness or rural innovation. This ensures long-term legitimacy and stable institutional support for cooperation projects.
- **Organizational model:** Works best through structured partnerships that include diverse actors (farmers, cooperatives, processors, research and advisory bodies). A lead partner should coordinate project design, funding, and communication.
- **Costs:** Main financial needs include coordination, capacity-building, and the implementation of collective actions such as innovation transfer, marketing, or logistics improvements.
- **Funding:** Public funding—particularly through CAP cooperation measures (e.g., Measure 16). Additional co-financing may come from private partners or regional development funds to ensure sustainability.
- **Value chain diversity:** Encourage the inclusion of multiple sectors (e.g., dairy, olive oil, cereals, wine) and diverse farm types to reflect regional strengths and ensure broad participation.

BENEFITS

- Increased competitiveness and improved market access for farmers.
- Strengthened cooperation and knowledge exchange across value chain actors.
- Enhanced innovation capacity and better value chain integration.
- Enhanced promotion of regional brands and sustainable production systems.
- Greater income stability and resilience for small and medium-sized farms.





FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- Measure 16.2 call: https://www2.regione.abruzzo.it/content/misura-m16-sottomisura-162-progetti-di-macrofiliera-seconda-fase
- National Database of Integrated Supply Chain Projects: https://www.reterurale.it/flex/cm/pages/ServeBLOB.php/L/IT/IDPagina/23082

Italy

@

Department of Agriculture of the Abruzzo Region:
Luigi D'Intino
luigi.dintino@regione.abruzzo.it
Cataldo De Palma
cataldo.depalma@regione .abruzzo.it
Elvira Di Vitantonio
elvira.divitantonio@regioneabruzzo.it

modernAKIS Together for Systems' Innovation

Supply chains

AKIS-in-Practice! 10.5

Practical Training and Advisory for Value-Added Agriculture in Short Supply Chains

Keywords/Tags

- Advisory services
- Back office
- Short Supply Chain

Potential users

- Managing Authorities
- AKIS coordination bodies
- Advisors
- Farmers and other agricultural workers

RATIONALE

Polish agricultural systems face significant challenges and opportunities tied to farmers' positions within value chains. Farmers often remain the weakest link in the chain, capturing limited added value due to structural inefficiencies and the dominance of large processors and distributors. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) recognizes training as a transversal (XCO) intervention to strengthen farmers' roles, including via better integration and competitiveness in value chains.

However, in Poland, many farmers lack the knowledge and skills needed for food processing, direct sales, and value addition, limiting their market options and income diversification. By engaging in small-scale processing and direct sales, farmers can bypass intermediaries, diversify their income, and capture the full retail value of their produce. However, transitioning from commodity production to food processing is complex, requiring specific, non-traditional knowledge.

This gap affects especially small and medium-sized farms that seek to produce traditional, regional, and high-value products but face barriers such as legal restrictions and lack of technical skills.
Agricultural advisors also revealed a need for updated, practical training on processing technologies, hygiene standards, food safety regulations, and marketing strategies. Their ability to guide farmers effectively depends on understanding how to create and manage local food processing facilities, navigate legal frameworks, and promote direct sales that bypass intermediaries. Therefore, tailored training for advisors is essential to empower them with the knowledge and tools to support farmers' market positioning and to achieve the specific CAP objective of improving farmers' position in value chains (SO3).

SOLUTION

The solution was a comprehensive, practical training program dedicated to empowering farmers to operate in short food supply chains through direct sales and small-scale processing. This hands-on training bridged regulatory requirements and technical know-how. The training initiative was entrusted to the Centrum Doradztwa Rolniczego (CDR), specifically managed by its practical unit, the Centre for Practical Training in Small-Scale Processing (CPSZ). CDR designed courses to equip advisors with theoretical and practical knowledge on processing technologies, hygiene, legal frameworks, and direct marketing, enabling them to cascade this expertise to farmers.
CDR leverages its established public-sector infrastructure and staff to deliver hands-on, practice-oriented courses tailored to real farmer needs, ensuring wide accessibility for farmers and advisors wishing to enhance their skills in small-scale processing, direct sales, and value chain integration.
The training was launched with high intensity, reaching approximately 6,500 participants within the first two years, reflecting strong national demand. This momentum has been maintained with around 30 groups of 25 participants trained annually.

IN PRACTICE

Since 2010, CDR's Centre for Practical Training in Small-Scale Processing has offered a blend of theoretical lectures and hands-on workshops covering processing lines for juice, meat, dairy, and grain milling.

Services, ensured at territorial level by regional branches of the CDR, include:

- Practical Training: Courses and workshops (often free) on processing techniques (e.g., dairy, cereals, juices, meat).
- Methodological Consulting: Guidance on legal, hygienic-sanitary, and fiscal requirements for operating under small-scale processing or direct sales.

The curriculum includes:

- direct marketing methods that bypass intermediaries to increase profitability and diversify farmers' income streams,
- core processing areas, such as grain, milk, meat, and juice,
- niche products such as fruit vinegars, jams, and freeze-dried items,
- market trends, marketing strategies focused on direct sales to consumers,
- operation of commercial-grade equipment, hygiene standards, EU and Polish regulations (covering food safety and limits on harmful substances).

Farmers gain practical experience by working with the machinery under expert supervision, producing traditional, high-value products like cheese, sausages, and juices.

The training is free for core participants, funded by national and EU programs like the Polish Rural Development Programme (PROW).

CDR managed personnel and teaching costs efficiently by integrating training duties into regular staff roles without extra pay. Only minimal operational expenses related to equipment upkeep (e.g., minor repairs) were covered, excluding depreciation costs, supported by the initial purchase of high-quality equipment.

Training services are complemented by several printed and digital resources, guidance as well as communication and information material.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR REPLICABILITY

- Target advisors: Use existing institutional capacity (like CDR) to train advisors, creating an exponential knowledge transfer effect.
- Prioritize practical skills: Provide hands-on, equipment-based training ensuring advisors and farmers gain marketable technical expertise.
- Focus on market impact: Select training topics based on clear market potential (e.g., NFC juice) to guarantee economic viability.
- Establish dedicated training centers: Outfit with relevant processing machinery and employ knowledgeable instructors.
- Develop comprehensive curriculum: Cover legal, hygienic, technological, and marketing aspects vital for small-scale processing.
- Provide learning materials: Distribute printed and digital resources supporting participant knowledge retention.
- Use effective communication channels: Promote courses through regional branches, websites, fairs, and advisory networks.
- Ensure cost efficiency: Integrate training into existing staff roles and cover minimal operating costs for sustainability.

BENEFITS

The training represents a powerful link between entrepreneurship capacities and market stimulation.

- Farmers gain practical skills to diversify income through new processed products, reducing market risk.
- Advisors receive up-to-date, practical knowledge on processing options to better guide local farmers.
- Policy makers/Public Funders maximize EU/National funds by fostering new enterprises and market development (e.g., machinery sales).
- Other AKIS actors (e.g., Suppliers) are better integrated within the agri-food systems as the training stimulates the market, resulting in significant sales.

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- Website of Center: https://cpsz.cdr.gov.pl/.
- Resources: https://cpsz.cdr.gov.pl/#wydawnictwa.

Poland

Agricultural Advisory Centre in Brwinów (CDR)
Marek Krysztoforski
m.krysztoforski@cdr.gov.pl

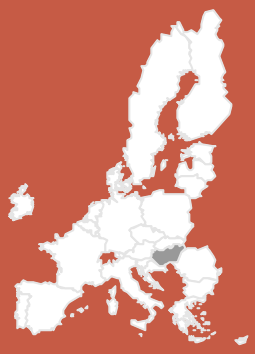
Watch this AKIS-in-Practice!

modernAKIS Together for Systems' Innovation

Supply chains

Get-inspired4AKIS! 10.6

Knowledge sharing and capacity building in short food supply chains (SFSC): training SFSC organizers and mentors through national and international practices



Keywords/Tags

- Peer-to-peer learning
- Study visits
- Training
- Mentoring
- Knowledge sharing
- Short Food Supply Chain (SFSC)

Potential users

- Small-scale producers and producer groups
- Consumer communities and buying groups
- Civil organizations and local authorities
- Advisors and innovation support services
- Policymakers and Managing Authorities

RATIONALE

Between 2000 and 2010, producer–consumer relationships in Hungary weakened significantly. Traditional direct sales, such as farmers' markets, still existed, but innovative forms of short food supply chains could not emerge on their own. The adoption of Government Decree 52/2010 on the conditions of small-scale food production, processing, and sales created new opportunities for local products. As a result, the number of registered small-scale food producers grew to about 23,000, generating strong demand for direct sales channels. However, producers generally lacked the organizational, marketing, and logistical capacities to establish and sustain these new forms of sales. Newly established farmers' markets often proved unsustainable and closed after a year, leaving producers without secure outlets. There was a clear need for trained facilitators to provide management, legal, and marketing support to make short food supply chains (SFSC) viable in the long term.

In addition, many small producers in Hungary operated in the so-called “grey zone” in terms of food hygiene and taxation. This was often due to a lack of knowledge or clear strategies for formalizing their businesses. Operating in this informal zone limited their access to public support schemes and hindered development. A key role of the SFSC organizer is therefore to help producers “step out of the grey zone,” enabling them to access funding, develop further, and engage in initiatives such as local markets or agritourism.

SOLUTION

To address these needs above, a comprehensive training and capacity-building system for short food supply chains was developed, drawing heavily on knowledge and results gained from LEADER, ERASMUS+, H2020 and Horizon Europe projects. This system has since been integrated into the CAP Strategic Plan (CSP), with trained SFSC managers and advisors eligible for support.

Applying a systemic approach, a three-level capacity development structure has been established:

1. SFSC Facilitator Training

2. SFSC Mentor Training

3. SFSC Advisory Network

The entire process is facilitated by the Kislépték Association, a civil alliance founded in 2013 to represent the smallest rural actors. The association provides legal and professional support while acting as a recognized partner at policy level. Its members include researchers, lawyers, communication and food safety experts, advisors, and farmers, who together identified the lack of management capacities and knowledge gaps among small-scale producers and designed responses.

SFSC Facilitator Training

The inspiration for this training came from a 2013 LEADER international cooperation project, which showcased French practices. In Aveyron county, France, an SFSC organizer employed by the Chamber of Agriculture supported producers in establishing a joint slaughterhouse, a cooperative shop, and a farmer-run restaurant. Their role included providing legal, business, marketing, and project management advice that producers lacked the time or expertise to handle. The organizer had studied at SupAgro Montpellier as a “Sustainable Food System Advisor.” At that time, no comparable training existed in Hungary. With an ERASMUS+ grant awarded in 2019, this model was adapted to Hungarian needs with contributions from experts from Czechia, Poland, Romania, France, and Hungary.

Source: https://www.facebook.com/RuralFacilitatorErasmusPlus/

Since 2022, the SFSC Facilitator Training has been available in Hungary, forming the foundation of the three-tier system. Several other countries have also adopted the training materials. The aim is to prepare rural managers who can handle day-to-day challenges of SFSCs, understand relevant regulations, and capable to organize e.g. markets or online marketing campaigns.

SFSC Advisors

Hungary also operates an official (registered) advisory system under the National Chamber of Agriculture. Advisors in this network are required to have university degrees but do not necessarily have more than 5 years SFSC-specific expertise. The aim of the Hungarian Living Lab in EU4Advice project is to develop training materials to fill this gap and provide targeted knowledge. The training materials are validated by the Living Lab actors and adapted to the Hungarian circumstances. The main objective is to embed a new and CAP-compatible (eligible to CAP Strategic support) SFSC knowledge system. These advisors usually specialize in specific fields (e.g. technology, labeling, logistics, legal issues) and can be accessed under the subsidized advisory scheme.

Networking

Follow-up support and knowledge sharing are facilitated by a dedicated Facebook group for SFSC organizers, where relevant information is regularly shared and input on policy changes is collected. Since 2022, the annual "SFSC Organizers' Day" provides training and networking opportunities. The event has consistently been fully booked, underlining the demand for this specialized knowledge. EU4Advice and Corenet Horizon Europe procects are working the the European network of SFSC advisors which will facilitate the communication and exchanges between 27 member states' advisors.

Policy Integration

Since 2025, the CAP Strategic Plan requires REL/SFSC cooperation projects to employ at least one trained organizer, embedding this practice into EU-level support frameworks. The aim would be to recommend a new eligible SFSC advisory system which could enable the SFSC advisors to share knowledge at national and local level moreover to be eligible for CAP support.

So far, the project has achieved the following results:

- 6 training sessions for SFSC managers have been organized, with a total of 78 managers trained.
- 6 SFSC mentors have been trained.
- 3 SFSC Expos have been successfully organized.

IN PRACTICE

- Training curricula for SFSC facilitators and mentors have been developed.
- SFSC organizers/facilitators are being trained in legal, business, project management, and communication skills.
- SFSC mentors are being trained to provide continuous, practice-oriented support to producers, with a focus on sustainability and to be able to provide knowledge in P2P.
- A Facebook group and the annual SFSC Organizers' Day foster ongoing knowledge exchange.
- Within EU4Advice, living labs test mentor training and individual development plans.
- Since 2025, CAP SFSC call requires cooperation projects to employ at least one trained organizer who obtained the SFSC facilitator certification.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR REPLICABILITY

- Requires a neutral facilitator organization capable of:
  - overseeing the context;
  - representing the interests of the small scale food producers;
  - setting up and organizing trainings;
  - managing co-creation integrating the knowledge of researchers, policymakers, advisors, and farmers.
- Willingness among producers to engage with structured support.
- Legal framework enabling small-scale producers to process and sell their products.
- Training materials adapted to local legal, cultural, and market contexts.
- Institutional support to embed organizers/mentors into cooperation schemes.
- Sustained mentoring and networking activities (events, online groups) are key for long-term success.

BENEFITS

- Strengthens producer–consumer relationships.
- Provides professional support for SFSC management, marketing, and logistics.
- Builds long-term sustainability of local markets and networks.
- Establishes a structured knowledge-sharing system (organizer–mentor–advisor).
- Enhances policy relevance through CAP Strategic Plan integration.

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- https://www.facebook.com/RuralFacilitatorErasmusPlus/
- https://eu4advice.eu/hungary/
- https://shortfoodchain.eu/

Hungary

Kislépték Association:
Katalin Kujáni
katalin.kujani@kisleptek.hu

modernAKIS Together for Systems' Innovation

Theme 11

Monitoring and evaluation of the AKIS strategies

Keywords/Tags

- Monitoring
- Evaluation
- Governance
- AKIS strategy
- Delivery

RATIONALE

Concepts and usefulness of M&E of the AKIS strategies

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) of AKIS strategies is a cornerstone for evidence-based decision-making within CAP. These processes support public authorities in making strategic, policy, and technical choices by providing insights into how AKIS functions, identifying strengths and weaknesses, and assessing the effectiveness of interventions under the CAP Strategic Plans (CAP SPs).

Monitoring involves the systematic collection of data to track activities and processes within AKIS, offering real-time insights for timely adjustments. **Evaluation**, on the other hand, is a structured expert function that interprets this data to formulate judgments, analyses, and robust recommendations. It assesses the effectiveness, relevance, coherence, and impact of AKIS strategies, supporting accountability and continuous improvement.

In practice, the M&E of the AKIS strategies serves several key purposes:

- Designing better strategies to support AKIS development.
- Ensuring alignment with CAP objectives, through strengthening its contribution to their achievement.
- Understanding to which extent and how the AKIS strategies and interventions are working well, at which conditions, through Identifying Success Factors and Barriers.
- To highlight what works, what doesn't, and why, thereby informing future AKIS strategy development and implementation.
- Supporting innovation uptake and knowledge flow across the AKIS.

For example, the recent European Commission study on Operational Groups (OGs) provides valuable recommendations to improve AKIS interventions. It highlights the need to enhance communication and dissemination through practice-oriented channels and multipliers such as advisors and trainers. It also calls for reducing administrative burden by simplifying reporting and payment procedures, increasing the use of Simplified Cost Options (SCOs), and allowing flexibility in project planning. Strengthening OG partnerships through balanced expertise and early engagement of all actors—especially farmers—is another key recommendation.

Requirements and responsibilities on Monitoring & Evaluation of the AKIS strategies

Evaluating AKIS strategies is a legal requirement under the EU CAP 2023–2027. According to Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 and Implementing Regulation (EU) 2022/1475, Member States must assess their CAP Strategic Plans during implementation and ex post, focusing on effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence, EU added value, and impact. AKIS, as a key component of the cross-cutting objective (CCO) to modernize agriculture and rural areas, must be evaluated accordingly.

The primary responsibility for monitoring and evaluation lies with the managing authorities of the CAP Strategic Plans, while evaluations must be carried out by independent evaluators.

According to the guidelines1for the evaluation of the AKIS strategies issued by the European Commission, the main objectives of the evaluation are:

- Assess AKIS's contribution to the CCO and relevant specific objectives (SOs).
- Evaluate how AKIS-related interventions support a well-functioning, integrated AKIS.
- Support Member States in building evaluation capacity and targeting CAP interventions effectively.
- Enable the Commission to conduct EU-level evaluations.

These evaluations can be conducted at different stages (ex-ante, ongoing, ex-post) and levels (individual, organizational, system-wide), offering a comprehensive understanding to strengthen AKIS and agricultural policy outcomes.



WHAT ASPECTS OF THE AKIS STRATEGIES MUST BE EVALUATED?

According to the EC guidelines the aspects of the AKIS strategies to evaluate are:

- how AKIS-related interventions contribute to the cross-cutting objective (CCO) of modernising agriculture and rural areas, and.
- how AKIS-related interventions contribute to other relevant specific objectives (SOs).

Additionally, it should be taken into account that AKIS is a complex and dynamic system involving a wide range of actors—farmers, foresters, advisors, researchers, trainers, NGOs, and public authorities—who generate, share, and apply knowledge and innovation across agriculture, rural areas, value chains, and environmental domains. AKIS strategies aim to strengthen this system by enhancing its structure, functionality, and capacity.

Therefore, the evaluation must assess how these strategies influence AKIS structural components (such as actors, infrastructures and interactions), their operational dynamics (including entrepreneurship and innovation processes, knowledge development and flows, research direction and so on), and the systemic capacities of the actors (like collaboration, learning, and strategic engagement) that enable AKIS to function effectively.

Ultimately, Member States may expand the scope to include all AKIS-related CAP interventions, beyond those under the CCO, to assess their contribution to a well-functioning and integrated AKIS.

In any case, the evaluation should be tailored to the specific intervention logic and AKIS configuration of each Member State.

Advancing Evidence-Based Policy: Strengthening AKIS Evaluation and Data Systems

Although AKIS strategies are formally introduced in this CAP programming period, the CAP has supported knowledge and innovation systems for over 20 years. However, there is still a lack of robust data and indicators to assess their territorial impact and capacity-building effects. Monitoring and evaluation must generate meaningful evidence to demonstrate AKIS strategies' added value in driving sustainable transformation. Persistent gaps—especially in farm-level impact and innovation scaling—require co-designed, robust methodologies. The EC study recommends strengthening evaluation and data collection, including AKIS staff in National CAP Networks, and requiring clear evaluation and dissemination plans in OG calls to improve design and tracking.

FIRST INSIGHTS FROM PRACTICES

The practices presented in this Compendium illustrate a diverse range of innovative and replicable approaches that effectively harness the potential of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) to support evidence-based design and implementation of AKIS strategies. They offer Member States practical models to strengthen innovation governance, improve intervention design, and ensure that AKIS strategies deliver measurable and meaningful results.

A shared feature across all these practices is their innovative character, reflecting the need to address the novelty and complexity of AKIS and its support interventions through new approaches, methods, and tools for monitoring and evaluation. One particularly important common thread is the development of structured data collection protocols. This reflects a growing awareness of the scarcity of relevant and robust information sources on AKIS components and interventions, and the need to generate meaningful data tailored to the AKIS approach.

The Target Estimator tool (Italy) fully reflects this awareness by offering machine learning for setting realistic performance targets for AKIS-related interventions by ensuring accuracy and credibility of target indicators, which are essential for tracking progress and guiding resource allocation.

Equally significant is the active involvement of AKIS actors in evaluation processes. Their participation demonstrates a clear understanding of the added value of co-producing knowledge that is both relevant and credible—for themselves and for policymakers. In several practices, such as the FSDN pilot (Italy), the SRL tool (Netherlands), the Logical Framework (Italy), and the AdvInnoQual Index, AKIS actors are engaged from the outset to co-define indicators and assess project logic, ensuring that evaluation reflects users' values, real conditions and supports learning, adaptation, and impact measurement.

Finally, the Swedish and Italian evaluations of Operational Groups highlight the diversity of evaluable dimensions—from success factors and innovation culture to system-level cooperation and knowledge flows—offering valuable insights for CAP Strategic Plan governance.

FOOD FOR THINKING

Questions for opening the discussion and reflecting on how to manage evaluations of the AKIS strategies are proposed by the Guidelines of the EC for the evaluation of the AKIS strategies (chapter 4). Moreover, some key questions might be proposed with a view to draw conclusions on the contribution of the AKIS strategies to the fundamental components, processes and capacities of the AKIS, such as:

- To what extent key coordination functions, such as research direction, market formation, support to scaling innovations, are played by the AKIS coordination body support the implementation of the AKIS strategic approach?
- To what extent are key AKIS actors and infrastructures present and actively engaged in the CAP Strategic Plan?
- To what extent is the AKIS strategy fostering the interactions between AKIS actors (e.g. farmers, advisors, researchers) in view of strengthening knowledge flows and innovations?
- To what extent.

HOW TO FOLLOW-UP WITH THE RESULTS OF COLLECTION OF AKIS-IN-PRACTICE!

- Getting familiarity with monitoring and evaluation concepts, perspectives, approaches and methods on AKIS and their strategies.
- In-Country workshops of the CoPs aimed at facilitating discussion and support decision about the evaluation demand among managing authorities, AKIS coordination bodies and evaluators and other stakeholders (e.g., CAP networks).
- Series of practice workshops at EU level (CCoP), aimed at defining key evaluation questions on the AKIS strategies.
- A practice workshop at EU level (CCoP), aimed at reflecting on how to follow-up the results of the AKIS strategies' evaluations.
- Practice workshops at EU level (CCoP), aimed at sharing practices, reflecting on experiences and views on the results of the evaluations and how to follow-up on them to meliorate the AKIS strategies and their implementation.
- Training on AKIS actor diagnosis, assessing interactions and benchmarking performance.

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

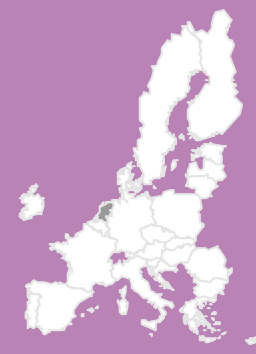
- Cristiano et al., 2023 (D1.1 modernAKIS).
- EUROPEAN COMMISSION – Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development – Unit A.3 (2023): Guidelines. Evaluating the AKIS Strategic Approach in CAP Strategic Plans.
- Training Module 6 of modernAKIS.
- EU SCAR-AKIS (2023) Strengthening EU AKISs, Brussels, European Commission (chapter 6).
- EUROPEAN COMMISSION – Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development – Unit A.3 (2024): Study on outcomes achieved by EIPAGRI Operational Group projects under the CAP.

modernAKIS Together for Systems' Innovation

M&E of the AKIS Strategies

AKIS-in-Practice! 11.1

Assessing Stakeholder Readiness: using the SRL Tool to strengthen innovation uptake



Keywords/Tags

- M&E
- Methods&tools
- Innovation

Potential users

- Managing Authorities
- Advisors
- Innovations support services providers
- Operational Groups
- Farmers

RATIONALE

Successful innovation in agriculture and rural development depends not only on the technological maturity of new solutions, but also on the readiness of stakeholders and organisations to adopt and integrate them into everyday practice. Many multi-actor and EIP-AGRI projects face challenges in assessing how prepared their partners truly are to implement innovations — in terms of motivation, available resources, internal support, and alignment with existing systems and routines.

Implementing innovation in real contexts is a complex process, often slowed down by social, organisational, or procedural barriers. Gaining early insight into stakeholders' readiness can therefore make a decisive difference.

SOLUTION

The **Stakeholder Readiness Level (SRL)** concept helps address this often-overlooked dimension by providing a structured approach to assess non-technical readiness and identify potential bottlenecks before implementation begins.

The SRL tool offers a clear overview of key factors that influence readiness — including value, support, costs, compatibility, and risks — helping users pinpoint where additional effort is required. Paying attention to these aspects from the earliest stages of project development accelerates the innovation process and increases the chances of long-term adoption.

The SRL tool can be applied by any organisation or innovation network aiming to implement new solutions more effectively — from research institutions and advisory services to Operational Groups and innovation support bodies within the AKIS.

IN PRACTICE

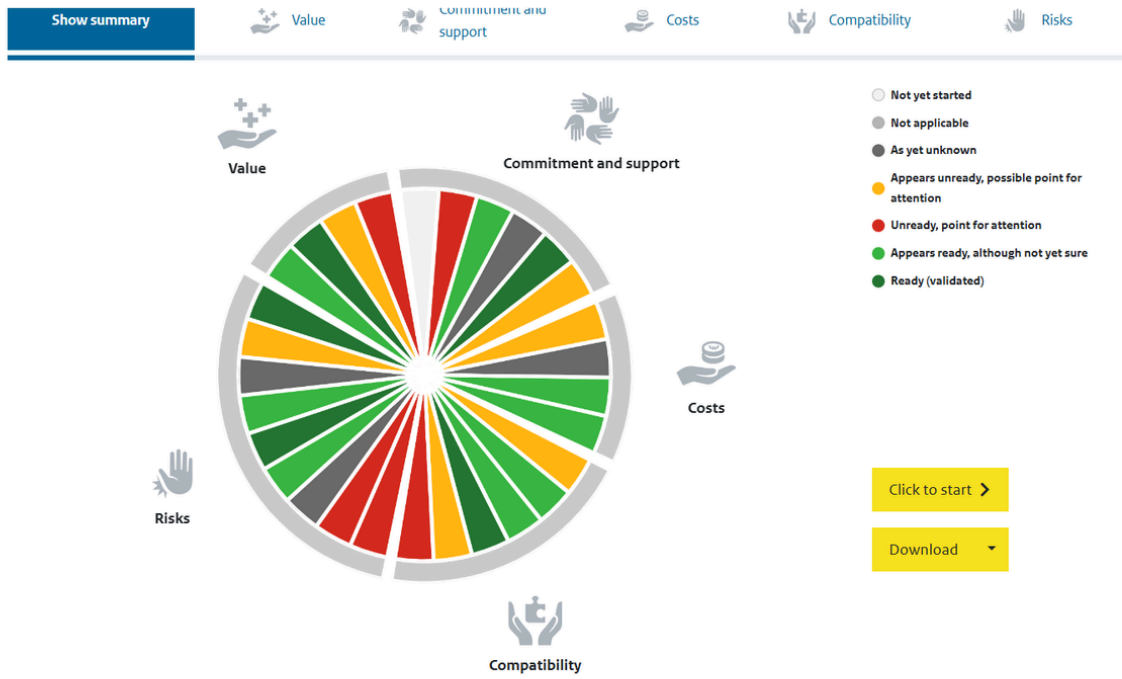
The **SRL** Tool (https://www.srl-tool.nl/) is an online, open-access self-assessment questionnaire developed by Rijkswaterstaat (the Dutch Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management). It helps project teams, innovation support services providers, and organisations measure their stakeholder readiness to adopt and implement innovations.

The tool assesses five core components:

- Value – the perceived added value of the innovation for end users.
- Commitment and support – the level of enthusiasm and potential resistance within organisations.
- Costs – estimated investment and implementation costs.
- Compatibility – how well the innovation fits within existing systems, legislation, and work processes.
- Risks – understanding and manageability of associated risks.

Each component is explored through guided questions, colour-coded responses, and reflection prompts, producing a visual dashboard that highlights areas requiring further attention.

Figure 1: Online SRL tool



Source: https://www.srl-tool.nl/

Each component is organized in sub-topics as follows:

SRL Component	Component description	SRL Sub-component
Value	The added value of the innovation for the organisation	• Added value for the organization (targets) • Added value for the organization • Added value for other users • Generic social benefit
Commitment and support	Enthusiasm and commitment for the innovation within the organisation and willingness to implement it	• Managerial support within the internal organization • Owner within the internal organization • Project manager within the internal organization • Conditions for the internal project manager • Support within the internal organization • Support among stakeholders
Costs	The costs involved in the development and implementation of the innovation and how the costs will be covered	• Development costs • Implementation costs • Willingness to invest among the external parties • Organisation's willingness to invest • Business model
Compatibility	The extent to which adjustments must be made to the innovation or existing processes in order to implement the innovation into these processes	• Current laws and regulations • Frameworks and guidelines within the internal organization • Purchasing strategy of the organization • Working processes of the organization • Working processes of the buyer • Change pressure
Risks	The risks applicable during the implementation of the innovation	• Reliability • Availability • Maintainability • Security • Safety • Health • Environment • Economics • Politics

Source: https://www.srl-tool.nl/

This structured overview supports better decision-making, planning, and co-creation among multi-actor project partners.

The online tool operates in three simple steps:

1. **Project details** – Users provide key information (project name, role, start date, etc.) to contextualise the assessment.
2. **SRL questions** – Participants respond to questions under each of the five components and assign **colour-coded readiness levels** (from "not yet started" to "ready/validated"). The system automatically generates a visual status for each area.
3. **Reflection** – Users interpret the results, identifying what aspects are in place and what still requires attention.

The results are displayed in an interactive dashboard with pie charts summarising readiness per component.

- **Red areas** indicate elements that still need significant work.
- **Green areas** show components close to completion or fully ready for implementation.

Users can **download PDFs, save projects locally,** and **update results over time**, allowing continuous monitoring throughout the innovation process.

The tool is currently available in four languages — Dutch, German, English, and French — which facilitates its wider use across countries and stakeholder groups.

The SRL tool has been widely applied in the Netherlands within EIP-AGRI Operational Groups, **innovation pilots, and advisory networks,** helping partners to visualise readiness gaps early and plan targeted support actions.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR REPLICABILITY

- **No licence or software costs**: the SRL tool is free and accessible online, so no specific budget is required for adoption.
- **Minimal technical setup:** only basic digital access and coordination among partners are needed.
- **Introductory familiarisation session recommended:** short internal training (1–2 hours) helps staff understand the five SRL dimensions and how to interpret the dashboard.
- **Facilitation capacity needed:** one trained moderator or innovation support professional should guide group reflection and discussion of results.
- **Integration into workflow:** the tool should be embedded into existing project evaluation or monitoring procedures (e.g. at proposal stage, mid-term review, or before scaling up).
- **Documentation and follow-up:** results should be archived and periodically updated to track progress in readiness levels.
- **Translation or contextual adaptation:** optional translation of key terms or minor adjustments to reflect local policy frameworks can improve usability (at the moment the tool is available in 4 languages).
- **Stakeholder engagement:** encourage project coordinators, advisors, and managing authorities to jointly use the tool to promote shared understanding of readiness challenges.

BENEFITS

- Facilitates evidence-based decision-making on innovation support and funding allocation.
- Improves monitoring and evaluation of innovation uptake within CAP Strategic Plans and AKIS frameworks.
- Enables early detection of implementation barriers among stakeholders and organisations.
- Supports targeted capacity-building actions and tailored advisory interventions.
- Promotes learning across regions and Member States, fostering more effective governance of innovation processes.
- Facilitates benchmarking, knowledge exchange, and continuous learning.

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- SRL online tool: https://www.srl-tool.nl/.

The Netherlan

Dutch CAP Network
Jeroen Nagel
j.p.nagel@roglb.nl

modernAKIS Together for Systems' Innovation

M&E of the AKIS strategies

AKIS-in-Practice! 11.2

Structured planning and monitoring framework for Operational Groups: the Sardinian approach

Keywords/Tags

- M&E
- Indicators
- Selection criteria
- Operational Groups

Potential users

- Managing Authorities
- Advisors
- Operational Groups
- Innovations support services providers

RATIONALE

Effective management of agricultural innovation projects, particularly those involving multiple stakeholders and interactive collaboration such as Operational Groups (OGs), require proper planning and continuous monitoring. These projects need to be designed in a way that ensures clear, achievable, and measurable objectives, while also enabling the assessment of their impact throughout the lifecycle. In the context of OGs, which involve close cooperation between researchers, farmers, and local stakeholders, it is especially important to have planning tools that facilitate not only project execution but also evaluation and continuous adaptation during implementation.

The Sardinia Region has implemented support for EIP-AGRI Operational Groups both during the 2014–2022 programming period and in the current one. While the previous period also included a specific setting-up phase, the 2023–2027 programming period has shifted towards directly funding cooperative innovation projects through a single implementation phase. In the previous period, 20 Operational Groups were supported with a total budget of approximately €9 million.

SOLUTION

The Sardinia Region, through its calls for the Support for EIP-AGRI Operational Groups intervention, has addressed the need for a more structured approach to innovation project planning. To this end, the Region decided to integrate into the funding application form—based on the National Rural Network template—the Logical Framework Approach (LFA), a tool designed to strengthen project design, coherence, and measurability.

By requiring applicants to complete the logical framework as part of their proposal, the Region ensures that each innovation project is built upon a clearly articulated rationale, with well-defined objectives, activities, outputs, and results. This approach also encourages the identification of quantifiable indicators, allowing for a more systematic assessment of the effectiveness and efficiency of funded initiatives.

The integration of the logical framework within the application process represents a significant improvement in how innovation projects are conceived and managed. It allows the Sardinia Region to align planning, monitoring, and evaluation under a unified methodology, facilitating both the comparability of Operational Group projects and the collection of evidence on their impact within the regional AKIS.

It not only enhances the quality and consistency of project proposals but also supports a results-oriented culture, ensuring that innovation efforts contribute effectively to regional and EU agricultural priorities.

IN PRACTICE

In the 2014–2022 programming period, the Sardinia Region incorporated the principles of the Logical Framework Approach (LFA) directly into the selection criteria for Operational Group applications. One of the criteria specifically assessed whether the project plan was structured according to the Logical Framework methodology—that is, whether it clearly described the cause–effect sequence linking activities, results, and objectives. Proposals demonstrating this logical consistency received a **score of up to 2 points.** This requirement encouraged applicants to design innovation projects with a clear internal logic, improving coherence and measurability already at the proposal stage.

In the **2023–2027 programming period**, this approach was further consolidated under the criterion “Project Logic” (Logica del progetto), which carries a maximum score of 5 points. The assessment focuses on the soundness and consistency of the innovation strategy presented in the Logical Framework section of the application form. In particular, evaluators consider three main aspects:

1. **Logical coherence** – the alignment between objectives, expected results, and planned activities, verifying whether the proposed actions are suitable to achieve the intended goals;
2. **Measurability** – the clarity and use of indicators to monitor objectives and results;
3. **Feasibility** – the adequacy of available resources, cost forecasts, and implementation timelines.

Each proposal is scored as follows:

- **Low:** only the first condition is fulfilled;
- **Medium**: two conditions are fulfilled, including the first;
- **High:** all three conditions are fulfilled.

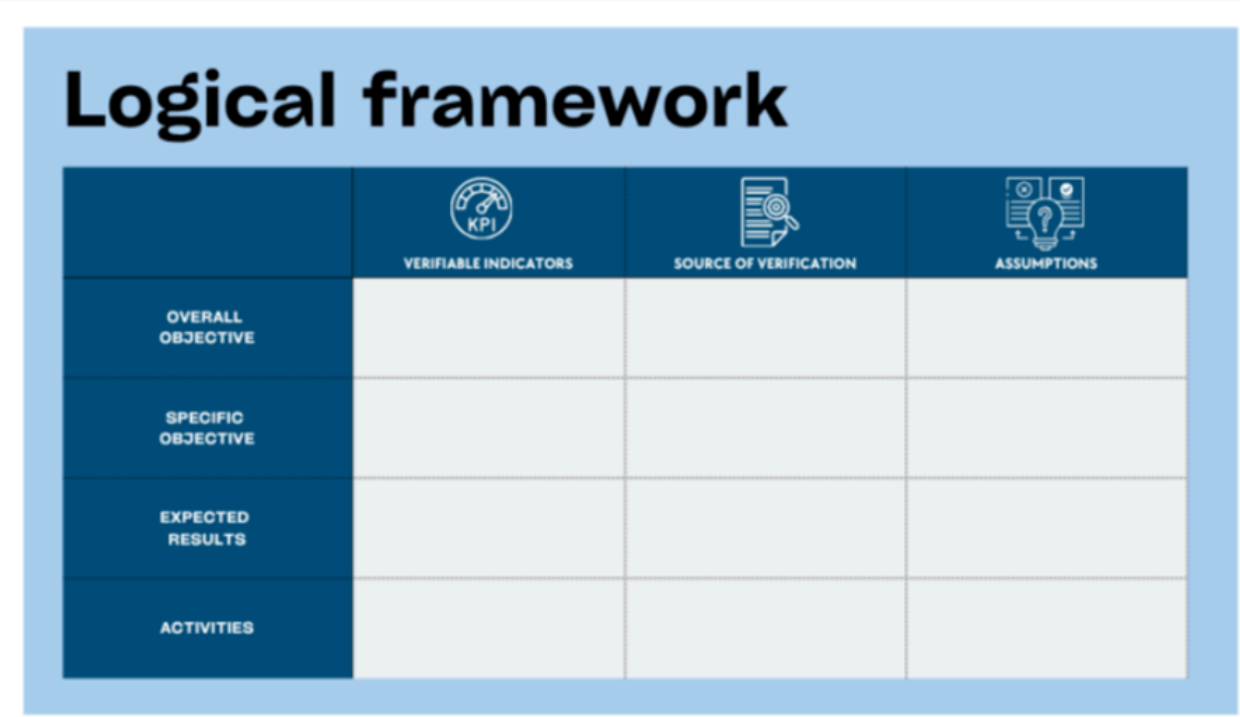
By integrating these Logical Framework-based criteria into the selection process, the Sardinia Region has effectively embedded Project Cycle Management (PCM) principles within its funding mechanisms. This ensures that innovation projects are not only eligible but also strategically designed, measurable, and feasible, strengthening the overall quality and accountability of Operational Group initiatives.

Within this matrix, applicants were required to (Figure 1):

- identify the overall and specific objectives of the innovation project;
- list the main activities to be carried out and the expected outputs;
- define result and impact indicators to measure progress and achievements;
- specify the assumptions and external factors that could influence success.

This requirement encouraged applicants to think through the entire project cycle—from problem identification to implementation and evaluation—before submitting their proposal. The inclusion of the LFA component thus helped ensure that Operational Group projects were more coherent, measurable, and strategically aligned.

During project implementation, the same framework also served as a monitoring tool, allowing managing authorities to assess progress and consistency between planned objectives and achieved results. This integration of PCM principles into the application process marked a shift from a compliance-based approach to one focused on performance, learning, and adaptive management.



PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR REPLICABILITY

- **Integrating planning tools into funding procedures:** Embedding the Logical Framework Approach (LFA) and Project Cycle Management (PCM) principles within application templates and selection criteria improves the overall quality of project design and monitoring.
- **Promoting a results-oriented culture:** Requiring applicants to define objectives, indicators, and expected results from the outset ensures that innovation projects are measurable, realistic, and strategically aligned.
- **Facilitating monitoring and evaluation:** The structured use of logical frameworks enables Managing Authorities to compare projects consistently and assess progress using common indicators.
- **Using standardized indicators:** The adoption of standardized indicators — such as those developed under the RICA framework — could further enable the comparability of farm-level data and support the quantitative monitoring of innovations across farms.
- **Adapting the model to other regions:** Other Managing Authorities can replicate this approach by tailoring the Logical Framework template to their administrative systems and providing training to both evaluators and applicants.
- **Strengthening accountability and impact:** Linking the Logical Framework to the scoring system (evaluating coherence, measurability, and feasibility) guarantees that funded projects are well-structured, feasible, and likely to deliver tangible results.

BENEFITS

- For Farmers: The planning tool helps farmers clearly understand the objectives, activities, and expected outcomes of their involvement in Operational Groups, improving their engagement and the overall success of the projects.
- For Administrators: The use of structured planning and indicators (such as those from RICA) simplifies monitoring and evaluation processes, allowing administrators to track progress efficiently and make informed decisions about resource allocation.
- For Stakeholders: The standardized approach to planning and evaluation promotes greater collaboration among stakeholders, ensuring alignment with common goals and facilitating knowledge exchange.

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- Call Operational Group 2014-2020: https://sardegnapsr.it/2021/bando/psr-sardegna-2014-2020-prima-fase-sostegno-per-la-costituzione-e-la-gestione-dei-gruppi-operativi-del-pei-in-materia-di-produttivita-e-sostenibilita-dellagricoltura/.
- Call Operational Group 2023-27: https://sardegnapsr.it/2025/bando/piano-strategico-della-pac-2023-2027-dellitalia-csr-2023-2027-della-regione-sardegna-intervento-srg01-sostegno-gruppi-operativi-del-pei-agri/.

Sardinia Region, Italy

Agri-food Enhancement and Promotion Division, Department of Agriculture, Regional Ministry:
agr.sviluppo.mercati@regione.sardegna.it

modernAKIS Together for Systems' Innovation

M&E of the AKIS Strategies

Get-inspired4AKIS! 11.3

From Innovation to Evidence: Evaluating OGs impacts Using FSDN indicators

Keywords/Tags

- M&E
- Indicators
- FSDN
- EIP-Agri Operational Groups

Potential users

- Managing Authorities
- AKIS coordination bodies
- Paying agencies
- Partners of OGs
- Advisors and other providers of innovations support services

RATIONALE

EIP-Agri is a cornerstone of agricultural modernization, with Operational Groups (OGs) as key instruments for on-field innovation under the CAP. Launched in 2012, it fosters multi-actor, bottom-up processes that transform research into practical solutions for farms. Yet, major gaps persist in evaluating OGs performance and tracing farm-level innovation pathways. Demonstrating real effects requires addressing attribution gaps and proving that outcomes meet farmers' expectations. This calls for result indicators that matter to farmers—co-designed with them—and an innovation roadmap including jointly agreed metrics to track project performance and farm impacts. However, the interactive and unpredictable nature of multi-actor innovation complicates defining coherent metrics. Robust methods and tools are needed to configure innovation processes and pre-define expected results for each solution, ensuring transparency, relevance, and measurable benefits for end-users.

SOLUTION

A pilot study was conducted by the Italian National Rural Network (2014–2023) between 2017 and 2022 to assess the usability of the Italian Farm sustainability data network (FSDN) in evaluating the effects of innovations developed by Operational Groups (OGs) under Measure 16 of the CAP. The study involved 20 farms participating in 14 OGs funded by two regional rural development programs (RDPs). These farms were grouped into two sub-samples based on regional affiliation.

For each farm, technical, economic, and structural data were collected through RICA (the Italian FSDN), complemented by additional questionnaires covering the 2019–2022 accounting years. These questionnaires captured details on the type of innovation (classified using USDA categories), investment costs, expected effects, relevant FSDN indicators, and the estimated contribution (%) of each innovation to indicator changes. A key methodological tool was the co-definition between the farmers and the FSDN surveyors of the "Adjustment Coefficient," used to isolate the innovation's effects from other – internal or external factors. The pilot confirmed that specific FSDN indicators—such as reduced input costs or increased yields—can be linked to several innovation types and co-identified with farmers as the most significant to reflect their expectations. The participatory approach strengthened data relevance and ownership (example in box 1).

Monitoring was conducted from the year of project selection (n=0) to two years post-completion (n+2), enabling baseline and ex-post comparisons. The study demonstrated that FSDN can support statistical analysis and robust performance evaluation of OGs.

The study laid the methodological foundation for developing administrative and project management procedures aimed at ensuring the tracking and evaluation of innovation effects at farm level. It further recommends integrating standard FSDN practices into EIP-Agri delivery across Member States.

Box 1: Examples of types of innovations and selected most significant FSDN indicators

Type of innovation	**Most Significant FSDN indicator**
Innovative precision farming tools to optimize irrigation and fertilizer management and reduce intensive pesticide use	Incidence of Variable Costs
New methods for soil management and vineyard phytosanitary defense	Net Land Productivity
Innovative cultivation practices to improving fruit and vegetable production	Profitability of Farm Revenues
Novel cultivation techniques, precision tools, and wine grape varieties to enhance product quality and pathogen resistance	
Sensor-based and DSS-driven robotic vineyard management	Net Labor Profitability
Novel techniques for dairy product processing/transformation	Gross Family Labor Productivity

IN PRACTICE

The proposed solution can be readily applied to ensure a structured approach for consistent data collection, robust evaluation of OG performance, and transparent demonstration of innovation benefits at the farm level—while also enhancing farmers' awareness and ownership of the innovation's effects.

For Managing Authorities and AKIS Coordination Bodies:

1. **Integrate FSDN Indicators in OG Calls:** Include a reference list of relevant FSDN indicators in calls for applications to guide applicants in planning farm-level impacts.
2. **Require Indicator Quantification:** Applicants must report the current value of selected indicators for each participating farm, estimate expected changes post-implementation, and apply an adjustment coefficient. Simplify this by including farms in the FSDN sample, enabling annual indicator updates without further intervention.
3. **Monitor and Validate Progress:** Require (possibly) interim and final reports to update indicator values, adjusting for external factors unrelated to the innovation.

For OGs:

1. **Select and Quantify Indicators:** During project planning, engage an advisor or FSDN surveyor with farmers to identify the most significant indicator. Record its current value and estimate expected change**s.**
2. **Track and Isolate Innovation Effects:** Monitor baseline and post-implementation farm level data to isolate the innovation's contribution from other influencing factors and apply the adjustment coefficient.
3. **Conduct Field Monitoring:** Perform periodic field visits to collect data and assess the real-time contribution of the innovation to the selected most significant indicator.
4. **Evaluate Final Impact:** Once the innovation is fully operational, re-quantify the indicator to measure actual impact at farm level by considering the adjustment coefficient.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR REPLICABILITY

- The costs of the survey might be drawn from the technical assistance of CAP SPs or encountered as part of the budget of the OGs' project.
- Preliminary engagement of advisors/FSDN Surveyors and their training to support adequately the pooling of the additional questionnaire.
- The evaluation plan should account for Operational Group project timeframes and the time lag in FSDN data collection and reporting.

BENEFITS

For Managing Authorities

- Enables performance planning using relevant, quantifiable indicators tailored to innovation types and farmer needs.
- Enhances transparency and accountability in CAP-funded innovation projects.
- Provides a framework for evidence-based evaluation of farm-level impacts using standardized FSDN indicators.
- Improves targeting of future interventions through data-driven insights.
- Enables comparisons of performance of other FSDN farms.

For Farmers & OGs

- Ensures that selected indicators reflect most significant priorities and expected outcomes.
- Offers clear benchmarks to assess the success of innovations at farm level.
- Builds trust in innovation processes.
- Supports internal monitoring within OGs and facilitates demonstration and sharing of achieved results.
- Allows long-term tracking of innovative farms and their interactions within OGs.

For Advisors and AKIS Actors

- Integrates the advisors within the OGs.
- Strengthens advisory services with robust, data-driven insights for tailored support.

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- Technical article: https://www.pianetapsr.it/flex/cm/pages/ServeBLOB.php/L/IT/IDPagina/3091 Scientific report: https://rica.crea.gov.it/download.php?id=16

Italy

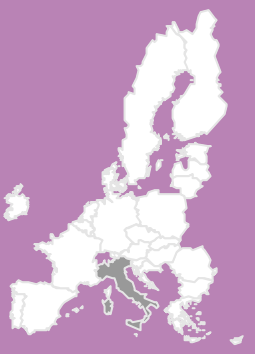
CREA, Policies and Bioeconomy:
Simona Cristiano
simona.cristiano@crea.gov.it

modernAKIS Together for Systems' Innovation

M&E of the AKIS Strategies

AKIS-in-practice! 11.4

Predicting Success: Machine Learning for Accurate AKIS Target Indicators under CAP



Keywords/Tags

- M&E
- Target Indicator
- Machine Learning

Potential users

- Managing Authorities and AKIS coordination bodies
- Evaluators of the CAP SPs
- Researchers

RATIONALE

Under the CAP framework, defining target indicators is mandatory by EU regulation. According to the official definition, "targets" means pre-established values, set by Member States in the framework of their intervention strategies and to be achieved by the end of the CAP Strategic Plan period in relation to the result indicators (European Evaluation Helpdesk for Rural Development, 2015). These targets serve as benchmarks for monitoring progress and guiding resource allocation. However, the European Commission does not provide clear methodologies for estimating them, leaving Member States to develop their own approaches. This gap has led to frequent revisions and inconsistencies in target values during programming cycles. Accurate estimation is crucial because these indicators measure progress toward CAP objectives and ensure accountability. Without robust methods, targets risk being unrealistic or misaligned with actual implementation capacity, especially for AKIS-related interventions where innovation, training, and advisory services require precise performance benchmarks.

SOLUTION

The Italian National Rural Network 2014-2024 (RRN) developed **an online tool and methodology** called Target Estimator to calculate annual and final target indicators for CAP Strategic Plans. This solution uses:

- Historical data series from previous programming periods.
- Machine Learning algorithms (Multilayer Feedforward Neural Networks – MFNN) trained to predict realistic targets through non-linear models.

The choice of MFNN was driven by the need to produce robust estimates—realistic, coherent, and reliable—addressing criticisms of traditional methods. Unlike linear approaches, MFNN predictive capacity relies on non-linear models, meaning estimated targets do not necessarily vary in direct proportion to expenditure changes. This ensures greater accuracy and adaptability to complex intervention dynamics, particularly for AKIS-related interventions such as training, advisory services, and EIP-Agri cooperation for innovation.

IN PRACTICE

To estimate intermediate and final targets, users access the **Target Estimator** tool on the RRN platform and follow these steps:

- Specify planned expenditure for 2023–2027 and select the result indicator to estimate targets.

- Multiple input options are available:

1. Define expenditure for all, some, or a single Managing Authority.
2. Enter total national expenditure and percentage allocations (regional amounts calculated automatically).
3. Enter total national and regional expenditure (percentages calculated automatically).

- Data upload options:

1. Import PSP 2023–2027 expenditure data linked to the selected indicator.
2. Upload an Excel file (.xlsx) with three columns: Regions, Total Expenditure (€), and % Completion.

- Using trained MFNN models, the tool generates intermediate and final targets, including confidence intervals.Users can export results for reporting and validation.

- Users can export results for reporting and validation.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR REPLICABILITY

- Ensure access to historical datasets for model training.
- Ensure availability of statisticians and ICT system developers
- Adapt algorithms to regional contexts and intervention types.
- Integrate the tool into national CAP monitoring systems.
- Provide training for managing authorities on tool use.

BENEFITS

For Project Partners :
Facilitates evidence-based planning and realistic target setting.
Reduces uncertainty in performance evaluation.

For Managing Authorities:
- Ensures compliance with EU requirements.
- Improves transparency and credibility of monitoring processes.
- Supports resource optimization and policy coherence.

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- Divulgative article.
- Technical report.
- Scientific article.
- Target estimator.

Italy

CREA:
Simona Cristiano
Simona.cristiano@crea.gov.it

modernAKIS Together for Systems' Innovation

M&E of the AKIS Strategies

Get-inspired4AKIS! 11.5

Quality assessment tool of the advisory services

Keywords/Tags

- Advisory services
- Quality
- Performance
- Assessment
- CAP

Potential users

- Policy makers
- Advisors
- Farmers and foresters

RATIONALE

The integration of advisory services within Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) is a cornerstone of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). This integration demands not only structural coordination but also a strong alignment with farmers' expectations and the delivery of high-quality services.

The growing complexity of agricultural challenges—climate change, environmental compliance, technological transitions—has expanded the role of advisors beyond traditional productivity-focused tasks. Farmers now rely on advisors for multifaceted support, from regulatory compliance to innovation facilitation. However, this diversification has led to fragmentation and variability in service quality, making it harder for farmers to identify reliable advisors and for policymakers to monitor performance.

Additionally, advisors need to systematically ascertain societal expectations and high performance though maintaining up-to-date competencies.

In this context, periodic assessment of the quality and performance of agricultural advisory services is not optional—it is a strategic necessity. Such evaluations ensure that advisory systems remain effective, responsive, and capable of supporting innovation and sustainability goals.

Currently, under the CAP framework, significant gaps exist in assessing AKIS performance. Addressing these gaps through systematic, evidence-based evaluation frameworks will strengthen advisory services, enhance transparency, and support the long-term objectives of CAP.

SOLUTION

The ERASMUS + project “RAMONES PL” (https://www.ramones.eu/en) developed a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework to assess the quality of agricultural advisory services. Central to this is the AdvInnoQual Index, a composite indicator that quantifies service quality based on structured criteria and sub-criteria:

Table 1: Quality assessment criteria

Relevance	Are advisory contents aligned with farmers’ and policy needs?
Effectiveness	Do services solve problems or achieve goals?
Responsiveness	Are services timely and satisfactory?
Reliability	Are services accurate and scientifically sound?
Innovation support	Do advisors facilitate innovation and transition?
Tailoring	Are methods adapted to farmers’ specific contexts?
Demand articulation	Can advisors help farmers express latent needs?
Empathy and soft skills	Do advisors build trust and offer personalized support?

The list of quality criteria is grounded in scientific literature and validated within groups of agricultural advisors and of public/funding administrations.

IN PRACTICE

The framework is operationalized through three structured questionnaires serving data gathering from:

- Public administrations: Assess satisfaction and service quality.
- Advisors: Evaluate competencies and performance.
- Farmers: Measure perceived quality and satisfaction.

The evaluation uses 5 points Likert scales to compare expectations vs. perceptions, generating scores across the above-mentioned quality dimensions. Using such a model allows avoiding pure self-assessment exercise by the advisor. In fact, the rating behind the Likert scale is not known to the advisor and the overall assessment includes also the perceived values of farmers and public/funding administrations. The survey may enable gathering data at the different territorial levels/AKIS (e.g. national/regional).

The assessment tool is as follows:

1. Preliminary Survey for Weighting: this is conducted to determine the mean importance values of each criterion and sub-criterion in the quality assessment, as perceived by public funding administrations, farmers, and advisors. The average importance values are then used as weights in the overall performance assessment. An example survey question is: “How do you rate the importance of this criterion (e.g., ‘Relevance’) in the provision of advisory services?”
2. An assessment survey is directed—preferably on an annual basis—to each of the two target groups: farmers and advisors. Its purpose is to evaluate the perceived quality of used/provided advisory services for each quality criterion and sub-criterion. An exemplary question of the survey for criterion “Demand articulation” is: “How do you rate the ability of advisory providers to identify farmers’ needs by highlighting issues that were previously unrecognized?”.

An overall performance assessment is determined based on:

- the average importance values. These are used as weights in the performance assessment for each criterion/sub-criterion. In practical terms, criteria rated as more important by stakeholders will have a greater influence on the final quality score; while less important criteria will contribute proportionally less.
- the weighted scores are combined using a linear aggregation formula:

INDEX=A·aA+B·aB+C·aC+...INDEX=A·aA+B·aB+C·aC+...averag scores for each quality criterion; a_A, a_B, a_C are the corresponding weights (mean importance values).

This process results in the AdvInnoQual Index which is a composite index reflecting both the performance and the relative importance of each criterion.

This quality assessment tool can be applied at individual/organization/system levels.

A systematic (once a year) implementation of this tool would allow building up data series on the state of the advisory services.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR REPLICABILITY

The framework is highly replicable across EU Member States.
Key considerations for replication include:

- Preliminary work has to be conducted to determine the weights of each criterion.
- An online assessment tool would help widen data gathering and assessment at system level.

BENEFITS

- Better alignment with farmers' needs and policy objectives.
- Construction of data series on advisory performances.
- Early identification of competence gaps and professional development needs.
- Support to the integration of advisory services within Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS).
- Enhance transparency, accountability, and effectiveness of CAP advisory interventions.
- Bridge the knowledge gaps of former monitoring and evaluation framework of AKIS-related types of interventions.

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- RAMONES-PL Methodologies of monitoring, evaluation and precision learning.

Italy

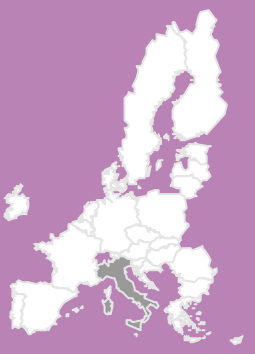
CREA:
Simona Cristiano
simona.cristiano@crea.gov.it

modernAKIS Together for Systems' Innovation

M&E of the AKIS strategies

AKIS-in-practice!11.6

Measuring Cooperation and Knowledge Flows in EIP-AGRI through Social Network Analysis



Keywords/Tags

- M&E
- Social Network Analysis
- Operational Groups

Potential users

- Managing Authorities
- Evaluators
- Operational Groups

RATIONALE

Operational Groups (OGs) funded under the EIP-AGRI initiative are designed to promote innovation through collaboration between farmers, researchers, advisors, and businesses. However, while the number of OGs has increased significantly across Italian regions, less attention has been given to how these actors actually interact and to what extent they create lasting innovation networks.

The EIP-AGRI initiative implemented in Italy under the Rural Development Programme 2014–2022 was a large-scale intervention, mobilising more than 650 partnerships and projects and investing over €210 million of public funds. This extensive implementation provides an unprecedented opportunity — but also a challenge — to understand how collaboration, knowledge exchange, and innovation flows have effectively taken place within and between these multi-actor partnerships.

Understanding these dynamics is crucial for steering the future design and programming of AKIS-related interventions under the 2023–2027 CAP Strategic Plan. Assessing the structure and strength of the existing cooperation networks can provide valuable evidence to improve innovation governance, strengthen interactive processes, and enhance the impact of future EIP-AGRI initiatives across Italy.

SOLUTION

The Italian National Rural Network (NRN) realized in 2021-2022 a comprehensive study aimed at providing a first assessment of the implementation of the EIP-AGRI model promoted by the European Union — particularly focusing on the interactive innovation approach. This assessment was designed to generate insights and policy lessons to be considered in the implementation of the EIP-AGRI initiative within the 2023–2027 CAP Strategic Plan.

The study was structured in several interconnected steps, each exploring a complementary dimension of the EIP-AGRI system. The methodological framework and tools adopted were cross-cutting and informed the entire process:

- **Analytical framework and tools:** the methodological approach, common to all steps, provided the basis for data collection, interpretation, and integration;
- **The OG partners:** analysis of OG partners characteristic from an online survey;
- Tools and stories: in-depth qualitative case studies of selected Ogs, highlighting innovation dynamics and stakeholder interactions;
- **The networks:** application of **Social Network Analysis (SNA)** to the INNOVARURALE database to map and interpret collaboration patterns;
- **Scientific literature:** a bibliographic review to contextualize findings within the broader discourse on the EIP-AGRI model;
- **Recommendations:** synthesis of insights into practical guidelines for enhancing the implementation of the interactive innovation approach.

Within this broader analytical framework, the SNA component focused on understanding the networking capacity of Italian OGs and their ability to create structured relationships for innovation transfer and knowledge co-creation.

The analysis used data from the Italian INNOVARURALE database, covering **484 OG**s active as of May 2021 (involving **4,183 partners**), with updates extending to May 2022.

IN PRACTICE

The Social Network Analysis (SNA) was conducted in three main methodological stages — network construction, computation of analytical indicators, and visual interpretation — in order to capture both the structural and functional dimensions of the relationships among Italian Operational Groups (OGs) and their partners.

1. Network construction

The analysis began with the development of two interconnected networks derived from the INNOVARURALE database:

- OG-to-OG network: a connection was established when two OGs shared at least one common partner. This model represents the degree of inter-project collaboration and the extent to which individual projects contribute to broader innovation networks.
- **Partner-to-partner network:** a connection was established when two organisations participated in the same OG. This model illustrates the level of collaboration and knowledge exchange occurring within and across local innovation ecosystems.

Starting from the affiliation matrix (partners × OGs), two square matrices (OG × OG and partner × partner) were generated. These matrices served as the foundation for calculating all the network measures and identifying patterns of cooperation.

2. Analytical indicators

To characterise the structural properties of the networks, a set of standard SNA metrics was computed:

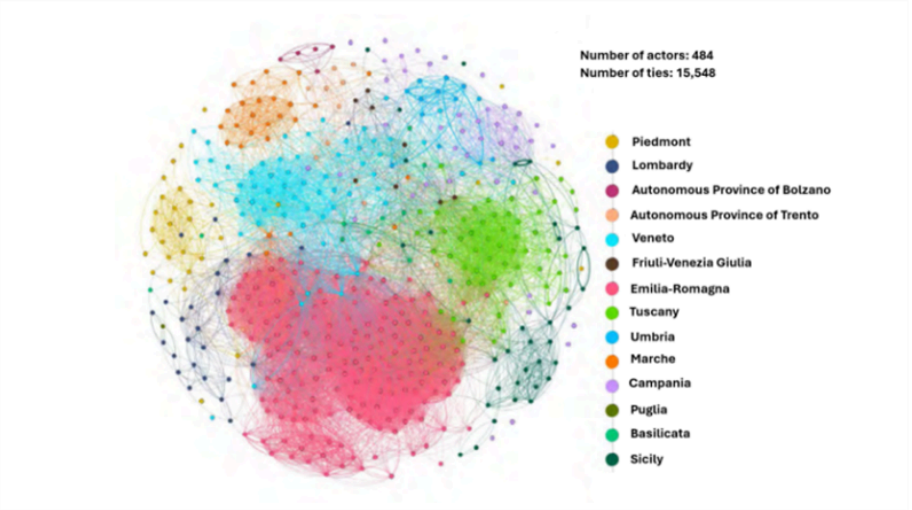
- **Cohesion indicators** — density, diameter, average path length, and degree centralisation — were used to assess how tightly or loosely connected the networks are and how efficiently knowledge can circulate within them.
- **Node centralities** — degree (popularity), eigenvector (influence), and betweenness (brokerage capacity) — were used to identify the most active, influential, and strategically positioned actors in facilitating information exchange or bridging otherwise disconnected groups.

These metrics allow quantifying both the overall cohesion of the network and the specific roles played by individual actors in shaping innovation dynamics.

3. Visualisation and interpretation

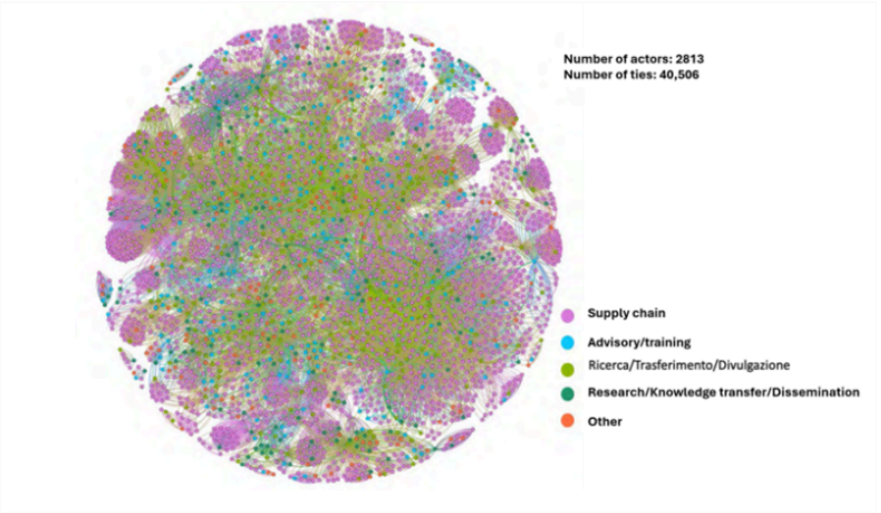
Finally, the results were complemented by graphical visualisations and cluster analyses to highlight geographical and thematic patterns of collaboration. This stage made it possible to identify regional hubs, sub-networks of cooperation, and isolated nodes, offering a clear view of how innovation is distributed and shared within the Italian EIP-AGRI system (Figure. 1, Figure.2).

Figure 1: Overall Network of Operational Groups



Source:Gava O. et al (2022)

Figure 2:Partners Network



Source:Gava O. et al (2022)

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR REPLICABILITY

- **Access to data**: Even when datasets are not fully open, ensuring the availability and accessibility of network data is essential for replication. When possible, using publicly available sources such as INNOVARURALE greatly facilitates the reconstruction of affiliation matrices and the monitoring of cooperation patterns across regions.
- Standard indicators: Adopting a consistent set of SNA metrics — including density, diameter, centralisation, and centralities — enables regional benchmarking and longitudinal monitoring of AKIS performance over time.
- **Evidence for policy targeting:** Identifying key nodes, such as influential actors and brokers, supports the strategic design of training, demonstration, and knowledge-exchange activities, ensuring that resources are directed where they can maximise impact.
- **Dynamic monitoring:** Regularly updating the dataset allows continuous observation of how innovation networks evolve during CAP implementation, offering timely evidence to refine cooperation and innovation policies. This analytical approach can also be entrusted to the independent evaluator of the CAP Strategic Plan, ensuring impartial assessment and the integration of SNA findings into broader evaluation frameworks.

BENEFITS

- **Evidence-based policymaking:** SNA provides objective, data-driven evidence to assess and strengthen cooperation and knowledge flows within the AKIS.
- **Enhanced connectivity and learning:** identifying influential and bridging actors supports the design of policies that amplify innovation diffusion and cross-sector collaboration.
- **Scalable and transferable methodology:** the approach can be replicated at regional or thematic levels, providing a versatile tool for monitoring multi-actor dynamics and guiding AKIS governance improvements.

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- Gava O., Iacono R., Izzi F., Longhitano D., Bonfiglio A., Lasorella MV., Borsotto P. (2022), Valutazione della capacità dei Gruppi operativi italiani di creare reti per l'innovazione. Italian National Rural Network (IT)

Italy

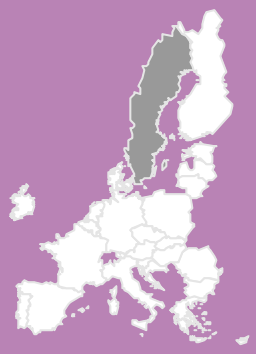
CREA:
Patrizia Borsotto
patrizia.borsotto@crea.gov.it

modernAKIS Together for Systems' Innovation

M&E of AKIS

AKIS-in-Practice! 11.7

Evaluation of EIP-AGRI Operational Groups in Sweden



Keywords/Tags

- M&E
- Indicators
- Operational Groups
- AKIS

Potential users

- Managing Authorities
- Evaluators
- Advisors
- Operational Groups
- Innovations support services providers

RATIONALE

Sweden's agricultural sector covers about 7% of the national land area, with approximately 55,000 farmers managing 2.5 million hectares of arable land and 0.5 million hectares of permanent grassland. In this context, EIP-Agri Operational Groups (OGs), multi-actor partnerships that introduce innovative projects, play a crucial role in driving agricultural transformation and addressing sector-specific challenges. The EIP-Agri program is coordinated by the Swedish Board of Agriculture, in a two-step procedure:

1. **Step 1**: Setting up phase - Formation of OGs, where stakeholders come together around an innovative idea related to agriculture, horticulture or reindeer herding and develop their proposal.
2. **Step 2**: Implementation phase, during which innovative ideas are developed and tested for wider application.

The Rural Network provides support to prospective applicants, helping them navigate the application process. Between 2014 and 2021, the EIP-Agri program was allocated a budget of €38 million, which increased to €45 million for the 2023–2027 period.

Evaluating the performance and outcomes of these EIP-Agri projects is crucial for better planning future interventions and improving the program's effectiveness during the current programming period.

SOLUTION

To understand the progress and outcomes of the **OGs** within the **EIP-Agri initiative** in Sweden between 2016 and 2024, an evaluation was commissioned from the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences. This analysis focused on identifying the key elements that contributed to the effectiveness of the projects concluded in Sweden between 2015 and January 2024. According to data from the Swedish Board of Agriculture, 91 EIP-Agri projects were completed during this period, each having a project manager at the time of completion.
The evaluation provides a clear picture of the challenges and successes experienced by the OGs, offering evidence-based recommendations that will guide future agricultural innovation projects under the EIP-Agri implementation.

IN PRACTICE

This evaluation aimed to analyse completed EIP-Agri funded projects, examining their success and failure, and providing valuable insights into the critical success factors that influenced project outcomes (Figure 1). To assess the effectiveness of the EIP-Agri OGs, a mixed-methods approach was employed, with literature reviews forming the foundation for data collection. Data were collected through cross-sectional surveys, which were then followed by qualitative in-depth interviews to provide context for the quantitative results. Specifically, the cross-sectional study combined with in-depth interviews addressed the following questions:

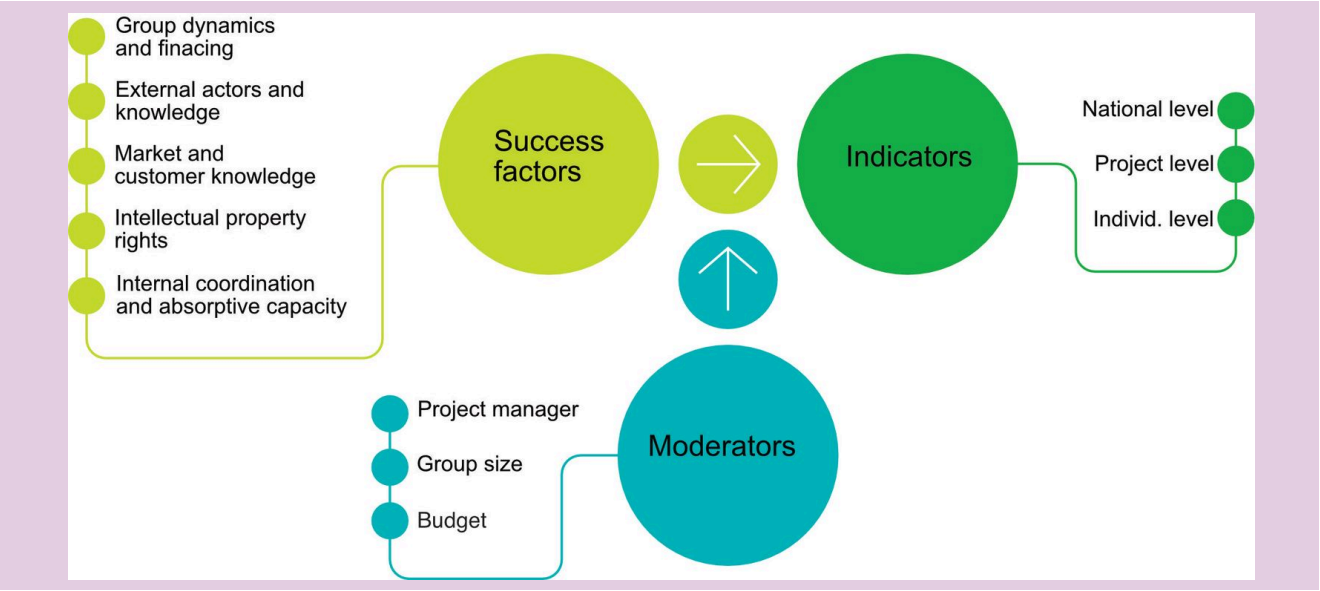
1. How can success be characterised and described for the completed projects funded by the EIP-Agri program?
2. What distinguishes more successful projects from less successful ones?
3. Can the success rate be improved through any type of support, and if so, what support is needed?
4. Can the results influence the guidelines, selection, or prioritisation of future EIP applications?

More in detail:

- **A web-based survey** was conducted in spring 2024. The survey included 22 main questions and a total of 98 sub-questions, distributed to the project managers of 91 completed projects (2018–January 2024). This survey achieved a 73% complete response rate, with 75 total responses, of which 66 were completed. The survey responses were analyzed using descriptive analyses and correlation analyses to identify patterns and key success factors across the projects.
- **In-depth interviews** were conducted with 6 project managers, purposefully selected to follow up on the survey results and provide a more detailed understanding of the projects. These interviews were used for qualitative analysis, helping to capture insights that the survey could not fully address.

However, one methodological weakness was acknowledged: the survey faced some unreliability in responses, particularly because project managers may have interests in relation to the EIP-Agri program, which could affect the objectivity of their responses.

Figure 1: Conceptual model of the evaluation



Source: Blix Germundsson, Hunter and Norrman (2025).

66 EIP-projects – from different sectors – were represented in the survey, with an average budget of 300,000 euros (Table 1). The survey revealed that 75% of project managers considered that the most important innovative solution developed in their project adequately met or exceeded the OGs expectations, with 50% claiming that their developed innovation solution is ready for others to use.

Table 1. EIP projects represented in survey

Sector	N	Group Size (mean)	Budget in 1000 EUR (mena)	Dev. Time Months
Crop Cultivation	24	5.4	286	24
Animal Husbandry	14	4.6	288	21
Horticulture	5	5.6	406	19
Reindeer Husb.	3	8.3	460	7
Food Processing	10	6.2	299	19
Rural Entr.	2	7.5	213	37
Value Chain	7	7.3	280	29
Other	1	7	410	10
Totals	**66**	**5.8**	**300**	**21.6**

Source: Blix Germundsson, Hunter and Norrman (2025).

The evaluation identified key drivers of success in innovation initiatives. Furthermore, OGs who had acquired a strong understanding of their markets and customers developed their innovative ideas more quickly. In addition, the results show that the program contributed to the development of a culture of innovation, as project managers stated that they were more likely to pursue innovative ideas in the future and were more inclined to collaborate with others than before.

Interestingly, no correlation was found between innovation culture and goal achievement, suggesting that innovation culture can be built regardless of whether one is involved in projects that fully reach their goals. In addition, the interviewees stated that they had learned, for example, how to create a successful application, collaborate with other actors, lead an innovation project, and about the specific requirements for administration and reporting of EIP projects. These findings offer valuable insights for the AKIS interventions in the current programming period.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR REPLICABILITY

To replicate this evaluation practice, several practical considerations should be considered:

- Institutional framework: A clear mandate is needed from the national or regional Managing Authority to commission an independent evaluation body, such as a university or research institute.
- Resource allocation: Sufficient funding should be dedicated to evaluation activities, including survey development, data analysis, and dissemination of results.
- Mixed-method design: Combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews to provide a comprehensive understanding of both outcomes and underlying processes. This dual approach enhances learning and supports evidence-based policy adjustments.
- Standardized indicators: Defining common success indicators—such as innovation uptake, collaboration effectiveness, and knowledge dissemination—facilitates comparability across Operational Groups and between Member States.
- Stakeholder engagement: Early and continuous involvement of project managers, advisory services, and managing authorities to ensure data accuracy, transparency, and stronger uptake of evaluation results. Their engagement is also crucial for ensuring the robustness of the evaluation process.
- Timing and data access: Evaluations should be scheduled soon after project completion to maximize response rates and accuracy. Reliable databases (e.g., national EIP project registries) could be relied on for effective tracking and contact management.
- Capacity building: Training evaluators and project managers in monitoring and evaluation (M&E) methodologies to promote consistency and sustainability of evaluation practices across programming periods.

BENEFITS

- Generates evidence-based insights into the performance and outcomes of EIP-Agri Operational Groups, informing future innovation support policies.
- Enhances policy design by providing managing authorities with practical recommendations to improve coordination, funding efficiency, and impact measurement.
- Establishes a replicable evaluation model that can be adopted by other Member States to monitor the effectiveness of OGs under the CAP.
- The evaluation promotes the need for continuous improvement through systematic reflection and feedback across EIP-Agric project stakeholders.

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- Blix Germundsson, Lisa, Erik Hunter, and Charlotte Norrman. (2025). Utvärdering av slutrapporterade EIP-Agri projekt. Öppen innovation inom jordbruk, trädgård och rennäring. Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Department of People and Society.https://publications.slu.se/?file=publ/show&id=140402

Sweden

Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences
Lisa Blix Germundsson
lisa.germundsson@slu.se

Theme 12

Cooperation for innovation under EIP-Agri

Keywords/Tags

EIP-Agri

Operational Group

AKIS strategy

Delivery

RATIONALE

Foundational concepts of the EIP-Agri operational groups

The European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural productivity and Sustainability (EIP-AGRI) was launched by DG AGRI in 2012 (COM (2012)79) to accelerate innovation across the agricultural ecosystem. Its primary aim is to enhance connections between farming and research, driving the sector's essential transition toward greater competitiveness and sustainability. This includes securing the supply of food, feed, and biomaterials, and ensuring the sustainable management of critical natural resources upon which the sector depends.

EIP-AGRI is built upon an overarching 'open innovation' concept, powered by the interactive innovation model. This model is inherently non-linear and unpredictable because solutions emerge through the dynamic relationships, co-creation, and continuous feedback among diverse actors.

The core functional concept is the cooperation between a plurality of relevant actors who combine complementary types of knowledge (scientific, practical, organizational) to co-create and diffuse ready-to-implement solutions that address the specific needs of farmers and other stakeholders.

Implementation occurs at both EU and Member State levels through several key instruments, including CAP Networks, CAP Operational Groups (OGs), and Horizon multi-actor projects. Among these, Operational Groups are the primary instrument for implementing EIP-AGRI under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), as they are formed specifically for the cooperation on innovative projects.

The Multi-Actor Approach and Interactive Innovation Model of Operational Groups

A thorough understanding of the Multi-Actor Approach (MAA) is essential to ensure effective project implementation and impact by the Operational Groups (OGs). Despite being a cornerstone of the CAP since the previous programming period and a crucial element for EIP-AGRI success, the core concept of the MAA remains surprisingly vague for many stakeholders. On this regard PREMIERE is a European Union funded project that aims to strengthen the MAA by supporting the development of more relevant, coherent, and well-prepared project proposals.
To ensure a project is genuinely multi-actor in practice, it must adhere to seven key principles:
1. Need/Opportunity-based relevance to clearly identified user challenges.
2. Active involvement of diverse, complementary actors from the outset.
3. Cross-fertilization of both scientific and tacit knowledge and skills to foster scalable innovation.
4. Effective facilitation using appropriate methods and tools.
5. Integration of research with best practices for added value.
6. Continuous feedback loops among partners, leading to co-production of practical, accessible outputs ready for use.
7. Dissemination through trusted channels tailored to end-user needs across Member States.

Delivering Operational Groups: Administrative Challenges in a Multi-Actor Innovation Framework

Although innovation cooperation has been part of rural development programming since 2007–2013, the Operational Groups (OGs) under EIP-AGRI introduced a fundamentally new model for public intervention in agriculture. The complex dynamics of interactive innovation model (plurality of actors, equal position in providing tact as well as scientific knowledge) poses significant challenges for administrative delivery.
From the outset—starting with the call for applications—public authorities face difficulties in defining clear evaluation criteria that reflect the essence of the MAA: actor diversity, innovation type, market potential, scalability, interaction quality, dissemination strategy, and project flexibility. These elements are crucial yet hard to standardize, making project selection and quality assessment a delicate process.
Once projects are underway, their evolving nature often requires adjustments to work plans, budgets, and timelines. This demands administrative systems capable of accommodating change without compromising accountability. Moreover, peer-to-peer dissemination activities, such as demonstration events on innovative farms, align better with MAA principles but are harder to monitor and report using traditional tools.
Effective needs assessment and engagement of potential users require robust **participatory methodologies** that foster **shared ownership** and accelerate uptake. These must be planned from the proposal stage, **with dedicated tasks or work packages,** sufficient resources, and clear procedures. Proposals must demonstrate how end-users will be actively involved in **co-creation and experimentation**, and how **transdisciplinary partnerships** will be structured.

On this regard, a structured MAA checklist – developed by PREMIERE HEU project - can support both applicants and evaluators ensures that all key elements are addressed, from initial design to final impact.

FIRST INSIGHTS FROM PRACTICES

The practices showcased in this Compendium illustrate two distinct yet interconnected challenges in the administrative delivery of Operational Groups (OGs). Both are rooted in the need to fully support the functionality of the Multi-Actor Approach (MAA), while ensuring administrative transparency and equal treatment across partnerships.
One practice, from Spain, addresses the challenge of managing project modifications during implementation. It introduces a dual-track system that distinguishes between substantial and minor changes, allowing for greater executive flexibility without compromising oversight. This dynamic approach enables projects to adapt to evolving needs while maintaining procedural integrity.

The second practice, from Italy, highlights the complexity arising from the heterogeneity of regional selection criteria. These criteria reflect the diverse priorities of managing authorities, which can lead to differences in the assessment of the quality and relevance of selected projects and on the consequential innovation paths across the territories. However, the development of robust yet adaptable evaluation frameworks has proven essential to improving the efficiency and responsiveness of future calls.

Together, these practices underscore the tension between fostering innovation through MAA and ensuring sound administrative governance. They demonstrate that effective delivery requires not only flexible execution mechanisms but also coherent and inclusive evaluation strategies that respect the diversity of actors and contexts involved.

Finally, it is worth noting that **additionally** to these two practices, others in the Compendium address complementary aspects of **Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E)** within AKIS strategies. Together, these practices reveal a shared trajectory of **uncertainty and innovation** in both the programming and delivery of EIP-AGRI Operational Groups (OGs).

For example, the **Target Estimator (n. 11.4)** underline the need for supporting the setting of realistic performance targets and guide resource allocation. The **evaluation of OGs' performance (n. 11.7)** shifts attention from project design to broader impacts on systemic cooperation and knowledge flows. Practices involving FSDN indicators (n. 11.3) and the Logical Framework (n. 11.2) emphasize the importance of integrating meaningful metrics to assess innovation outcomes. The **SRL tool (n. 11.1)** supports early self-assessment of non-technical readiness, identifying bottlenecks before implementation. Together, these practices reflect a shared uncertainty and a search for innovation in programming, delivery, and evaluation—underscoring the need for coherent administrative practices aligned with MAA principles.
Collectively, they demonstrate that effective support for OGs requires a more **coherent and adaptive administrative framework**—one that aligns with the principles of the **Multi-Actor Approach (MAA)** and accompanies projects from the call for applications through to impact evaluation.

FOOD FOR THINKING

In this perspective, the following questions can be raised (not exhaustive) to open the discussion and reflect on how to better deliver the EIP-Agri through the OGs under the CAP SP:

- How can administrative systems evolve to support innovation without losing accountability?
- Which set of selection criteria well-balance administrative transparency with assessment on credible and operational multi actor approach?
- How to assess the credibility of a real partners engagement process, and especially of the farmers and silent one, that is not only continuous but also strategically bidirectional (cross-fertilization) to ensure the relevance and co-ownership of innovation?
- Are current training, support mechanisms (methodologies, innovation support services, applicants' documentation) sufficient to embed MAA principles in project design and evaluation?
- Should flexibility be a formal design principle in all innovation-related public programs?
- Is the delivery model of EIP-Agri well-structured to fully support and enable genuine interactive innovation processes within Operational Groups?
- How can we simplify and standardize M&E for peer-to-peer knowledge transfer (like demonstration events) to accurately measure impact while minimizing reporting burden on Operational Groups?

HOW TO FOLLOW-UP WITH THE RESULTS OF COLLECTION OF AKIS-IN-PRACTICE!

- Series of EU-level practice workshops (CCoP) aimed at comparing experiences, sharing practices and tools, reflecting on available solutions, and co-creating new approaches to balance administrative burdens with enabling mechanisms for effective EIP-Agri implementation.
- In-country focus groups of Communities of Practice (CoPs) designed to facilitate discussion and support decision-making on delivery mechanisms that reduce administrative burdens while maintaining alignment with the Multi-Actor Approach (MAA).
- Focus group sessions aimed at defining the scope of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) for Operational Groups (OGs), to better inform decisions related to EIP-Agri implementation.

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- Module 1: The need for systems approaches in agriculture and interrelated fields.
- Module 4: Interactive innovation.
- EUROPEAN COMMISSION – Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development – Unit A.3 (2024): Study on outcomes achieved by EIPAGRI Operational Group projects under the CAP.
- European Commission, DG AGRI H.5., 'Guidelines on Programming for Innovation and the Implementation to the EIP for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability', Programming period 2014-2020 – Updated version, December 2014. Guidelines on programming for innovation and the implementation of the EIP for agricultural productivity and sustainability.

modernAKIS Together for Systems' Innovation

Cooperation for innovation under EIP-Agri

AKIS-in-practice! 12.1

Regional approaches to the selection of EIP Operational Groups

Keywords/Tags

- M&E
- Selection criteria
- Indicators
- Operational Groups

Potential users

- Farmers
- Operational Groups
- Managing Authorities
- Advisors
- Innovations support services providers
- Researchers

RATIONALE

Within the CAP Strategic Plan 2023–2027, the Cooperation intervention (Article 77 of Regulation (EU) 2021/2115) provides support for EIP-AGRI Operational Groups (OGs) that develop and implement innovative solutions for agriculture, forestry, and rural areas.

In Italy, where CAP is implemented through a decentralised governance model, each Region or Autonomous Province manages its own call under this intervention.
As a result, selection criteria and scoring systems differ significantly, reflecting regional priorities, administrative capacities, and thematic strategies.

In Italy, where CAP is implemented through a decentralised governance model, each Region or Autonomous Province manages its own call under this intervention.
As a result, selection criteria and scoring systems differ significantly, reflecting regional priorities, administrative capacities, and thematic strategies.

Eighteen regional Managing Authorities have chosen to finance this intervention, allocating approximately €154.7 million (updated as 31 December 2024). This amount has gradually increased compared with earlier versions of the CAP Strategic Plans, confirming the strategic importance of Operational Groups within the Italian AKIS.
The resources allocated to Operational Groups account for about 35% of the total Italina AKIS budget, highlighting their central role in promoting innovation.

Ten Managing Authorities — Abruzzo, Emilia-Romagna, Marche, the Autonomous Provinces of Bolzano and Trento, Piedmont, Sardinia, Tuscany, and Veneto — have already published their calls for Operational Groups. Among these, Marche, Trento, Piedmont, Sardinia, Tuscany, and Veneto have fully allocated the expenditure programmed in their respective CAP Strategic Plans.

Source: elaboration on CAP SP

SOLUTION

The comparison covers 10 regional and provincial calls (Emilia-Romagna, Liguria, Lombardia, Marche, P.A. Bolzano, P.A. Trento, Piedmont, Sardinia, Tuscany, Veneto).
Despite being based on the same legal intervention – Support for EIP Operational Groups under the Cooperation intervention, regions have applied different weightings to the main selection areas:

- **Partnership composition and governance: 7 – 30 points**
- **Quality and relevance of the project: 7 – 50 points**
- **Dissemination and knowledge-sharing activities: 2 – 30 points**
- **Financial consistency and feasibility: 1 – 20 points**
- **Contribution to CAP Specific Objectives (OS PAC): 5 – 25 points**

The analysis of these regional differences helps to understand how national and regional levels interpret EU innovation objectives, providing valuable insights into the coherence and effectiveness of the innovation support framework within the Italian AKIS.

IN PRACTICE

Across Italy, the implementation of the Cooperation intervention for EIP Operational Groups shows a remarkable diversity of regional approaches. Each Managing Authority has adapted the European framework to its specific agricultural context, policy priorities, and stage of AKIS development.
Some regions, such as Marche, Lombardy and Emilia Romagna place stronger emphasis on project quality, while Veneto and Sardinia highlight the partnership characteristics of the OG.

Table 1: Selection criteria defined for the Support for EIP Operational Groups under the Cooperation intervention (maximum score assigned by Regions), September 2025

Region		Partnership characteristics of the OG	Presence of advisory service providers[1]	Qualitative characteristics of the project	Quality of dissemination and communication activities	Relevance and consistency of the financial plan[2]	Contribution to the achievement of CAP SOs[3]	Max score
Emilia Romagna	*SO2 - SO3*	19%	7%	29%	5%	8%	15%	***100***
	SO4 - SO5 SO6 - SO9	19%	7%	29%	11%	8%	15%	
Liguria		15%	10%	30%	15%	20%	0%	***100***
Lombardy		20%	20%	42%	10%	3%	5%	***100***
Marche		25%	5%	50%	20%	0%	0%	***100***
A.P. Bolzano[4]		33%	5%	33%	10%	5%	0%	***21***
A.P. Trento		21%	17%	24%	13%	8%	18%	***120***
Piedmont		15%	10%	25%	30%	10%	0%	***100***
Sardinia[5]		>28%	11%	31%	17%	14%	0%	***n.a.***
Tuscany		16%	5%	16%	29%	7%	26%	***97***
Veneto		30%	15%	15%	20%	10%	10%	***100***

Source: elaborations on regional calls

Most regions attribute a significant share of points to **project quality**, which ranges from 24% in Trento to 50% in **Marche**, often combined with the assessment of dissemination and communication activities. This reflects a shared emphasis on methodological robustness and on the capacity of projects to generate transferable knowledge. Marche stands out for devoting half of the total score to qualitative aspects, while **Lombardy** allocates 42% to the same criterion, supported by strong attention to partnership composition and advisory service involvement.
In several regions, including **Emilia-Romagna**, additional qualitative elements are rewarded — such as the participation of training institutions, actions promoting environmental or social sustainability, and the involvement of farms located in less-favoured rural areas. **Liguria** links its scoring system to cross-measure coherence, granting additional points when at least one beneficiary is also involved in CAP interventions on advisory services or training.

The Autonomous Provinces of Bolzano and Trento exemplify two distinct models: Bolzano applies a simplified framework (maximum 21 points) that integrates sustainability-related criteria (environmental, social, and animal welfare), whereas Trento adopts a highly detailed system (maximum 120 points), combining multiple dimensions — from project quality to the contribution to CAP objectives — in a structured assessment grid.

Regions such as **Tuscany, Veneto, and Piedmont** apply more balanced models, distributing scores across partnership characteristics, dissemination, and qualitative project features. Sardinia remains unique in not setting an upper limit to the number of organisations that may take part in an Operational Group, encouraging broad cooperation among rural actors.
Overall, the **maximum scores range from 21 to 120 points,** confirming the **heterogeneity of regional interpretations** and the absence of a single evaluation model. This diversity highlights how Italian regions adapt a common European framework to their s**pecific agricultural, institutional, and innovation contexts**, translating CAP principles into differentiated approaches to innovation support within the national AKIS.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR REPLICABILITY

To enable a coherent comparison across regions, approximation and harmonisation were necessary, since some criteria were grouped or split differently in regional calls.
For instance, in Marche, the Autonomous Province of Trento, and Piedmont, the criterion “Presence of advisory service providers” was merged into “Partnership characteristics of the OG.”
In Emilia-Romagna, Lombardy, Marche, Trento, Sardinia, Tuscany, and Veneto, the criterion “Relevance and consistency of the financial plan” was included within “Qualitative characteristics of the project.” Likewise, in Lombardy, Trento, Tuscany, and Veneto, the criterion “Contribution to the achievement of CAP Specific Objectives” was assessed as part of the “Qualitative characteristics” dimension. Piedmont, instead, assigns a maximum of 10 points for specific thematic areas, which are not classified under the macro-category ‘Qualitative characteristics.

These methodological adjustments were essential to ensure comparability and interpretability of the data, while preserving the specificities of each regional evaluation framework.

BENEFITS

- Enables benchmarking between regional approaches and strategic choices within Italy and across other Member States.
- Supports reorientation and fine-tuning of future calls, allowing Managing Authorities to adjust their selection criteria or funding logic based on observed practices.
- Facilitates strategic reflection on how to strengthen coherence, transparency, and impact of innovation support mechanisms in future programming periods.
- Provides a basis for transnational comparison, offering insights into how different Member States interpret and implement the Cooperation intervention under their CAP Strategic Plans.

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- Italian AKIS interventions calls: https://www.innovarurale.it/it/akis-nella-pac/normativa-e-bandi

Italy

CREA - PB:
Rossella Ugati
rossella.ugati@crea.gov.it
Elisa Ascione
elisa.ascione@crea.gov.ite

modernAKIS Together for Systems' Innovation

Cooperation for innovation under EIP-Agri

AKIS-in-practice! 12.2

Ensuring flexibility of EIP-Agri cooperation for innovation projects

Keywords/Tags

- EIP-Agri Operational Groups
- Advisors
- Transregional projects

Potential users

- Managing authorities of the CAP strategic Plans
- Coordinators of Operational Groups
- Paying Agencies

RATIONALE

The EIP-Agri framework promotes innovation via the Operational Group (OG) multi-actor approach, which uses an inherently interactive innovation model. This model is unpredictable because project outcomes and pathways are driven by the dynamic relationships between partners, their knowledge exchange, co-creation processes, and continuous feedback loops from end-users. Projects are, therefore, not static but evolve significantly over their lifecycle.

To capitalize on this adaptive nature OGs require a degree of administrative flexibility to revise their ongoing activities and adapt their initial plans. This is essential for ensuring that final innovations are relevant and genuinely address real-world needs identified through the cooperative process.

However, granting such flexibility presents a significant administrative challenge for funding bodies (e.g., Managing Authorities, AKIS coordination bodies). They must reconcile the need for dynamic project management with the strict mandate for bureaucratic compliance and the critical requirement for standardized criteria that ensure equal treatment among partners of all OGs. This specific, criterion-based flexibility is thus justified as a necessary bridge, ensuring both the integrity of the interactive innovation process and sound administrative practice.

As a matter of fact, partners of OGs very frequently claim for adaptations of initial project workflows and this also happened in Spain.

It is important to define several aspects:

- What can be modified and under what conditions, being those minors (e.g., budget re-allocation) or majors (e.g., emergency situations, death of partners, bankruptcy) cases.
- The percentage and financial limits of the modification.
- What cannot be modified and the exceptions.
- The documentation to be provided must be easy to complete.
- The members of the operational group must be supported throughout the process.

SOLUTION

The Spanish Ministry of Agriculture offers a comprehensive information package, including detailed guidelines for Operational Group applicants and beneficiaries, complemented by templates, webinars and a dedicated helpdesk accessible via email and phone.

IN PRACTICE

To request and implement variations to the original EIP-Agri project, Operational Groups (OGs) must follow a dual approach based dependent on the change's severity:

- **Substantial Modifications:** Changes affecting core objectives, overall budget, or partnership composition (e.g., changes in partners, key activities) are considered substantial modifications.

  - Procedure: These require a prior formal request by the OG representative to the Managing Authority. The request must include detailed justification and an updated Plan of the project.

  - Condition/Limit: The change must be explicitly approved before implementation and must not alter the essential nature or exceed the maximum financial aid of the original project.

- **Minor Variations:** Minor changes (e.g., small timeline shifts, minor modifications to non-core activities) do not require prior approval.

  - Procedure: They must be documented and justified in a specific report or annex submitted with the final execution documentation/payment request.

This structured process ensures that all changes, including those for emergency situations (like partner replacement), adhere to standardized criteria while enabling OGs to adapt their innovative plans.

GUÍA BÁSICA PARA EL BENEFICIARIO
DE APLICACIÓN DURANTE LA EJECUCIÓN DEL
PROYECTO INNOVADOR

SUBVENCIONES PARA LA EJECUCIÓN DE PROYECTOS DE INNOVACIÓN DE INTERÉS GENERAL POR GRUPOS OPERATIVOS DE LA AEI-Agri

CONVOCATORIA 2025

Financiada por el MAPA y el Fondo Europeo Agrícola de Desarrollo Rural (FEADER)

V.1. noviembre de 2024

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR REPLICABILITY

Governance and Administration

- Establishment of a Dual-Track Approval System for substantial modifications (ex-ante authorization) and for minor variations (ex-post justification).
- Check the approval of paying agency.
- Creation of Criterion-Based "Check-Out" Rules which are replicable and non-negotiable criteria ensuring the contribution's integrity is maintained regardless of internal project shifts.
- Development of clear guidance documents, easily accessible, operational manual that clearly spells out what constitutes a "minor" versus a "substantial" change, complete with templates and deadlines.

Project Execution and Partnerships

- Prior empowerment of the Lead Partner (Coordinator) to manage all changes, centralizing administrative submissions.
- Set up clear internal agreements for partners to consent on all changes.
- Focus of justification on innovation Integrity as changes must improve innovation quality, not just meet administrative needs.

Financial Management

- Adoption of Simplified Cost Options (SCOs) to reduce complexity of micro-level budget changes.
- Set clear thresholds for budget shifts: Establish percentage limits requiring formal approval for reallocations.

BENEFITS

For Project Partners

- Reinforce confidence in multi-actor approach.
- Increased visibility and trust among farmers and stakeholders.
- Opportunity to co-develop innovative advisory models.
- Budget efficiency along with financial implementation and execution of projects.
- Project results are improved.
- Interactive innovation is reinforced.

For Managing Authority

- Improved efficiency and transparency in service delivery.
- Real-time monitoring of advisory performance and farmer satisfaction.
- Stronger alignment with CAP and AKIS integration goal.
- Provide flexibility and adaptability.
- Managing authorities improve the success of these projects by giving the adequate framework to modify their proposals.

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- Basic guidelines for the beneficiary during the execution of an innovative project.
- All the information on subsidies “Subvenciones a la cooperación para la preparación y ejecución de proyectos de innovación de interés general por grupos operativos”.

Spain

Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.MAPA:
Juan Pedro Romero Trueba
jpromero@mapa.es
Raúl Carbonell
Zarcorcarbonell@mapa.es

Annex 1: Methodological note

How is the Compendium co-developed by key AKIS actors?

The methodology for the collection, developing, sharing and discussing the contents of the Compendium is based on MA principles highlighted in D1.1 and D1.2 in view to address specific needs and expectations of key AKIS actors of change, through providing insightful meanings for the overall capacity development path applied by the TAJs.

In fact, the Compendium, is meant to be the result of a collaborative work of reflection and systematization of learnings by the AKIS coordination bodies and other key AKIS actors, about the respective experiences and practices relating to the AKIS strategies.

The procedure to identify the themes, topics and practices for the D1.5 is described in the table below (Table A1).

Table A1 – Co-development of D1.5

Period	Description (n. of events)
November 2024	1 Validation of the CNA 2024 during the AKIS CB General Assembly
February – September 2024	4 AKIS Core Development Group Meetings (Recurrent meetings): • 21st February 2025 • 16th April 2025 • 18th June 2025 • 17th September 2025

For the purpose of the Compendium 2025, and with the view to fully achieve a meaningful co-development of practices, it was decided to establish a Core Development Group to ensure a stronger contribution from partners and foster greater exchange and discussion among them.

The Core Development Group is composed of partners from five Member States — Italy, Spain, Sweden, Lithuania, and Hungary — and is primarily responsible for searching, collecting, and drafting the practices. The group met on a bimonthly basis.

Unlike what was initially foreseen, a steering group was not established, as in several cases its representation would have overlapped with that of the Core Development Group. Therefore, it was decided to avoid duplication and proceed without creating this additional structure.

So that, the overall methodology approach includes the following main steps:

1. Define the themes/topics: Clearly articulation of the themes/topic of the Compendium, using the CNA results.
2. Collect Information: Task the core development group with actively searching for and gathering practices. This may involve reaching out to various AKIS stakeholders to identify successful and innovative practices organizing focus groups or collecting the practices from other WPs events.

3. Draft Practices: the core group write and standardize the documentation of practices using a predetermined template, ensuring consistency and clarity.
4. Discussion and Reflection: organizing sharing events with modernAKIS network members and, more in general, AKIS stakeholders.

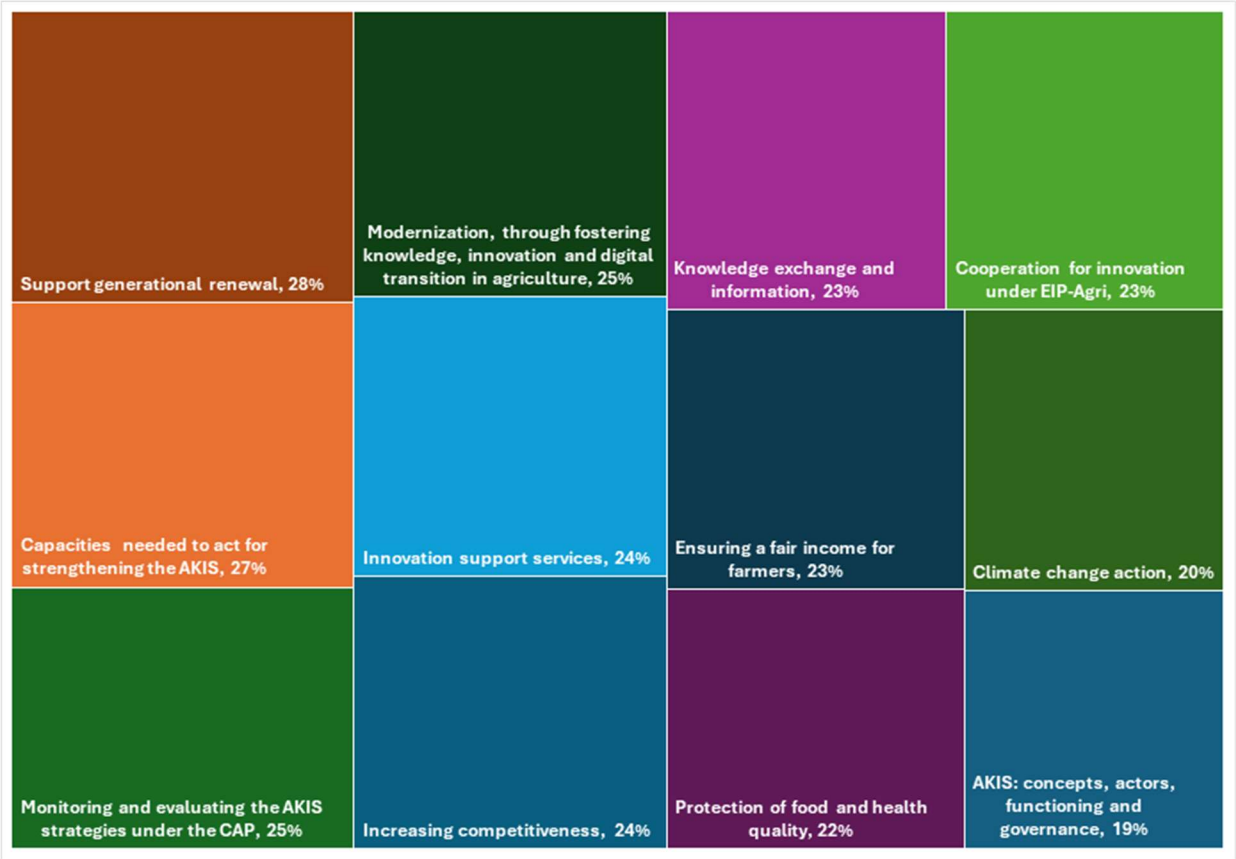
In addition, targeted emails were sent to countries that had not yet contributed any practices, to encourage their direct involvement in the Compendium.

At the same time, a social media campaign was launched to gather practices from AKIS actors outside the consortium, focusing on specific thematic areas (e.g. *contribution of the AKIS to generational renewal*).

Identification of key topical areas of relevance

The CNA was launched in coordination with T2.2 and has so far been conducted twice—first in 2023 and again in 2024—with the 2025 edition currently underway. Each year, the CNA follows a two-phase process. The first phase consists of an online survey using a Likert scale to capture participants' views on strategic AKIS topics and CAP objectives. The second phase involves co-validation by the AKIS coordination bodies and other actors during the General Assembly of the AKIS Coordination Bodies, where the survey results are refined, and the most pressing topics and related project activities are prioritized to inform the modernAKIS learning agenda. The CNA results for 2024 are presented in Figure A2.

Figure A1. Results on CNA 2024 edition *(n=133)*



Participation increased from 101 respondents in 2023 to 133 in 2024, representing a broad range of stakeholders from across the EU. In 2023, the most represented groups were AKIS Coordination Bodies and

advisory services, followed by researchers and educators. Participation from farmers and agribusinesses, initially limited, improved notably in the 2024 assessment—an important step toward achieving more balanced and inclusive representation.

Boundaries of this first Compendium

Given that this Compendium is practice-based, the development of this D1.5 encountered some limitations that will be, very possibly, outdone over the following years, particularly:

Although the establishment of the **Core Development Group** and the wider dissemination of practices have significantly improved the partners' capacity to draft and co-develop practices, some difficulties still persist, especially when drafting practices related to countries other than their own.

These challenges, often linked to time constraints and limited familiarity with specific national contexts, are expected to be progressively addressed by further differentiating roles and responsibilities among partners and AKIS coordination bodies, in order to better align them with each actor's capacities and preferences.