



modern **AKIS**

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AKIS in action:

Fostering knowledge flows and innovation: Aligning research with practice needs, 2nd session

Networking event on May 28, 2025 - Online

Co-creation or Co-frustration? Structural barriers that researchers face in engaging in multi-actor approaches?

Sangeun Bae, University of Hohenheim, Germany

Swedish Knowledge Hubs

Jennie Cederholm Björklund, Swedish CAP Network, Sweden

Lighthouse farms as innovation drivers for soil and climate-friendly farming strategies: The Austrian network

Niklas Bruhn, University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences Vienna, Austria

Moderation: Julia Eberharter, Austrian Chamber of Agriculture

Q&A Session

Questions to Jennie:

Q: Could you elaborate a bit more about the Knowledge Hubs? Are they legal entities? Do they offer services? How do they work on a daily basis?

A: Yes, they are own legal entities, and they are operated in quite different ways. They have the same objectives – to collaborate on needs from practice and on research results and make them communicate – but the "how" is not predefined, so each does it differently.

Examples:

- The **Digitalization Hub** works with expert networks, including advisory organizations, industry, and farmer federations.
- The **Animal (Livestock) Hub** works with analysis groups, inspired by groups in the CAP network.
- The **Entrepreneurship and Business Management Hub** mostly works with externals, especially advisory organizations.



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- The **Environment and Climate Hub** is based in the Swedish Board of Agriculture and was reshaped into a knowledge hub.

I also shared a link to the Livestock Knowledge Hub's new webpage, which aims to make research results available to everyone. The goal is to eventually include all hubs and subjects in this knowledge bank.

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Q: Have you taken specific actions in the knowledge hubs to integrate researchers with practice needs? And can you give recommendations?

A: Yes, they really work hard on that. Three of the hubs are research organizations, so they actively try to bring research closer to practice – through conferences, webinars, experience groups, study visits, and many other activities.

Q: Your CoP analysis group is the same as the national CoP for modernAKIS?

A: Yes, one of them. We have two national CoPs with different perspectives - one with an overarching national system perspective, and one with a business perspective.

Q: How are the hubs funded?

A: Different funding and different duration of time. Some with national money and some from the CAP Strategic Plan.

Q: What are the key outcomes you expect from the Knowledge Hubs and the CoPs (communities of practice)? How do you measure success, and are there targets?

A: It's a really good question. Honestly, I don't know the answer. I think there are targets set, but I haven't been involved in that part. I'm sure the government has targets, since it's the managing authority funding these hubs. I can get back to you on that.

Q: One of the goals of the Knowledge Hubs is to better integrate advisors into AKIS. What do the Knowledge Hubs do to improve this situation?

A: Since all hubs involve advisors – in expert networks, analysis groups, and so on – they force them to engage with AKIS. They also make research results more understandable and relevant to advisors. Once advisors see the value, they stay involved in AKIS.

Questions to Niklas:

Q: Sangeun mentioned several barriers for academics. Do you experience similar challenges when working with farmers in co-creation? And what did you change to overcome those challenges?

A: Yes, of course, we experienced challenges. In our case, we were lucky because there was already a loose network before the research project started – especially thanks to

Dr. Bodner, who is very actively involved in one of the farming associations and knows many farms.

But it's hard to formulate scientific questions that address the actual problems farmers have. It requires thinking outside traditional scientific methods. Scientific experiments usually involve controlled conditions, but here we work in real fields, which are not experimental fields, so you need many replicates. Communication is also a challenge – everything is spread out, so regular meetings are the key to staying focused on shared goals.

Q: Who is in charge of farmer communication in your project? Is it a researcher?

A: Communication is handled mainly by the advisor group, which includes members of a self-organized farming association and employees from regional agricultural chambers. They are in regular contact with the farmers and also helped identify the innovative farms. They are not researchers, more like practitioners or advisors.

Q: Do farmers use the website, or is it mainly for advisory services?

A: The website doesn't exist yet – it's still being planned. But yes, the idea is that farmers will have individual accounts and can log in to access tailored information.

Addition (Jennie):

In Sweden, a similar system is planned, inspired by Danish colleagues. There will be one login for advisors and one for farmers, offering different views and levels of detail.

Question from Paula (to all):

In many co-creation projects, scientists often take on the role of knowledge brokers. Could this role be more effectively fulfilled by someone with a hybrid profile – combining scientific knowledge and technical skills, ideally with strong local context awareness?

Answer (Sangeun):

Yes, this happens often, especially in multi-actor projects like ours. Researchers take this role by default. There's growing interest in creating new roles like "integration experts" – not researchers, but individuals who serve as knowledge brokers. In our projects, advisors can also play this role.

Key needs:

- Capacity building
- Institutional mechanisms to support the role
- Funding to enable and sustain such hybrid roles

This ties into the broader need for systemic approaches to overcome these barriers.

Answer (Jennie):

In Sweden, we believe that the Knowledge Hubs can help solve this issue by acting as brokers between science and practice. We also have green clusters at the regional level,

which bring together entrepreneurs, researchers, and advisors, and act as brokers as well.

Answer (Niklas):

Yes, this hybrid profile is very valuable. In our group, some researchers have a farming background, and it really helps them communicate better with farmers – they understand the challenges and can talk on the same level.

Question (General):

How do you deal with the issue of “speaking different languages” – between more practical practitioners and more theoretical researchers?

Answer (Sangeun):

It's a huge challenge. It's not just language, but differences in values, assumptions, and goals. In projects like i2Connect, we've learned that you must not take shared understanding for granted.

Key tools:

- Reflexivity – understanding and communicating our own assumptions
- Creating safe spaces for real dialogue
- Trust, time, funding, and systemic support for relational work

Answer (Jennie):

I was an industrial PhD student and previously worked in agriculture and advisory services. That experience allowed me to speak to all sides. Researchers must recognize that farmers have a lot of knowledge, and knowledge flow should go both ways.

Answer (Niklas):

Yes, especially innovative farmers – they have deep insights into soil, even if they think differently. When we sample fields, we talk to farmers, ask about their challenges – it gives us a very different and important perspective.

Comment from Paul (acknowledged by moderator):

His message emphasized the need for equality between researchers and practitioners. He expressed hope because he now sees awareness and positive movement in this direction – something that was missing years ago when private advisors weren't willing to participate without compensation.

