

# European CAP Network seminar 'Fostering an effective and integrated AKIS in Member States'

## Short report

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Vilnius, Lithuania

**Innovation and Knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI**



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## Introduction and focus

The EU CAP Network seminar 'Fostering an effective and integrated AKIS in Member States' was organised in Vilnius, Lithuania, on 14-15 June 2023. The event was organised by the Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development (DG AGRI) and the Support Facility for Innovation & Knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI, and hosted by the Lithuanian AKIS cluster.

The conference assembled 150 people. The mixed presence of on the one hand AKIS coordination bodies and CAP Managing Authorities and on the other hand national CAP networks and advisors influenced discussions positively and kept the focus on practical knowledge flows.

DG AGRI Deputy-General, Mr. Wolfgang Burtscher, kicked off the event, by emphasising the importance of increasing knowledge and innovation flows for the transition to more sustainable agriculture and rural areas, as well as for reaching Green Deal targets in a feasible way. The too weak links between farmers, advisors, researchers and all kind of other experts affect the overall competitiveness. A better functioning AKIS will make co-created knowledge and innovation quicker implemented by farmers and all involved.

The plenary session, including 14 presentations, discussions and conclusions, was recorded, with interpretation into five languages (EN, DE, FR, IT and ES). This will give the regions and all others who could not attend the possibility to learn from the event at home whenever they have time. For many AKIS interventions, the competence is at regional level, while AKIS coordination starts at national level and reaches out to the regions. Thus, it is important all work together. Even though the national level in a regional MS may not always be aware of all details of the interventions on knowledge and innovation, from the seminar it became clear that ways are being sought to overcome this obstacle. Spain for instance, presented their national AKIS plenary coordination body, co-led by the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Science, in which all regions are represented, together with advisors, farmers' unions and other key AKIS actors.

Participants enjoyed the capacity building presentations and the intense discussions in the breakout sessions. They were very satisfied and took home a lot of inspiration from the knowledge exchange organised in the formats as described above. It became clear that what has been planned in the CAP Strategic Plans is already evolving towards better interventions, which create knowledge flows among those interactions and within the planned networking activities. Further changes are to be expected resulting from the seminar.

The seminar zoomed in on two main topics within an AKIS Strategy, as set out in MS' CAP Strategic Plans:

1. **'AKIS models' in Member States**, including the role given to AKIS Coordination Bodies and their supporting networks. How they will influence AKIS implementation and AKIS related interventions in CAP Strategic Plans in MSs, for instance through the role of the national CAP networks, national knowledge reservoirs, and other tools and activities relevant for a well-functioning AKIS?



2. **The roles of advisors, their training and ways of getting them more integrated within the AKIS, including their role as innovation support providers.** This individual innovation support for each grassroots innovative idea is an obligation under the new CAP and may be organised as part of innovation advice or with funding for the first step in the preparation of an EIP-AGRI Operational Group project.

The work for participants started in the weeks before the seminar, using a series of questions in a Google Document for participants to fill in and share online for internal discussion.

After the welcome session, the seminar kicked off with the clarification by DG AGRI of the basic legislation and the AKIS related concepts, accompanied by an overview of AKIS related opportunities under Horizon Europe work programmes. In total, there were 14 presentations, including the overview of the outcomes of the google questionnaire, good examples from 8 Member States on AKIS coordination and integration of advisors in the AKIS, and information from 2 AKIS supportive Horizon Europe coordination projects.

All Member States were present and invited participants were chosen from the following 5 categories:

1. AKIS Coordination Bodies / AKIS Implementation entities at national level;
2. Managing Authorities, at national level;
3. National CAP Network Support Units;
4. A representative for each region of the regional Managing Authority or regional AKIS Coordination entity.
5. A representative from advice: either the competent person in the Managing Authority, a key advisor or a representative of an advisory body

## Key take-away messages

The key take-away messages are the following:

- › **MS' AKIS strategy has gained traction** since the approval of MSs' CAP plans last year. Understanding of Authorities has clearly improved and is further improving as time goes by and more and more AKIS actors become fully involved. Member States authorities illustrated their AKIS coordination model in the presentations as well as in the breakouts. Interesting comments were exchanged from which they will learn.
- › **MS' AKIS coordination models vary greatly**, from implementation mainly being done by the Ministry, or by the public advisory body, or by the CAP network or by a research organisation. The Horizon Europe project ModernAKIS is systematically following these evolutions and, at a later stage, will deliver us a report on the state of play. The project coordinator did an already very interesting introductory presentation in the first part of the event.



- › **The AKIS coordinating body should work as a spider in the web**, was the message of DG AGRI's first presentation, actively driving knowledge flows and innovation, while reaching out to all existing knowledge and innovation organisations and networks. **The fact that AKIS coordination bodies should try to work as much as possible with existing networks, ensuring to connect stronger the essential parts of the AKIS, while not reinventing the wheel and adding where needed only, seems to be well understood.** MS also discussed how to tackle hurdles they encounter, such as the involvement of researchers, which are often not rewarded for their efforts for impact for practice, since the research system is based on production of scientific abstracts, with which farmers or other practitioners are not reached. The few MS who found solutions were very well listened to.
- › **A number of MS have already thoroughly restructured their knowledge, research and innovation landscape**, for instance by merging certain AKIS related bodies (research institutes, advisory bodies, CAP networks, related administrations). By being together in one organisation/body, the knowledge flows can better be organised and pushed. Co-location of research, advice and networks (+education, farmers' organization, food cluster, etc.) is cheap, efficient and helping knowledge flows in an informal way.
- › It appears that indeed, **both public and private advisors are being integrated into the AKIS**, which is a great bonus in terms of reaching all farmers through their trusted advisors. This was during the CAP plan negotiations still a big point of discussion, so noticing this was very positive. The good example of a great number of MS will push further the last ones to go the same way also.
- › **Another key change in the new CAP, transparency and equal involvement of all impartial advisors** also seems to be well taken in. If you want to reach all farmers, you have to connect to all advisors, and for sure the trusted ones. Many MS already have or plan an advisory register with all advisors, adding their experience and competences, and their geographical location. This will enable farmers to find the best advisors according to what they need.
- › **More MS plan to include advisors in their EIP AGRI Operational Groups (OGs)**, through eligibility or selection criteria in the OG interventions. This will help the input from practice as well as the capturing of grassroots innovative ideas or problems, to produce solutions in a co-creative manner in the OG innovation projects.
- › The inspiration **on knowledge vouchers, as implemented already by a few MS, was much appreciated as a means to work more demand-driven in advice and training** and to be more effective with the funding. It is to be expected that more MS will implement such system in the coming years.
- › **Some MS, such as Sweden and NL, which do not have public advisors, seek other approaches to impact practice through advising.** For instance, Sweden already has a few nationally funded knowledge hubs with specialist advisors, and will develop more knowledge hubs in the new CAP: about 100 specialist advisors, publicly funded, are already active and in good collaboration with research.
- › Also other MS have or plan **“back-offices” with specialist advisors** to help the field advisors on specific themes with further knowledge, often collected in **national knowledge reservoirs**.



- › These countries, such as NL, EE, LU and others have a keen interest to connect with the **Horizon Europe EU-Farmbook project, which will make national knowledge reservoirs interoperable and develop a high quality search function based on artificial intelligence and ontologies**. Some countries are already connecting their existing knowledge reservoirs with EU-Farmbook now.
- › Overall, the information from Member States, from DG AGRI, from the Horizon projects on AKIS coordination (ModernAKIS) and on Innovation Support Services (ATTRACTISS) was very well appreciated. During the breakouts, the **information from other MS inspired greatly**.
- › In conclusion, from what we heard what is ongoing in MS and from the inspiration from the seminar which was greatly appreciated, **we may expect a lot of CAP plan modifications in the near future, which will improve the AKIS strategies** in the good sense.

## More information on the seminar

Over the last decade, the need to look at the concept of Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) in a broader context, emphasising the importance of agricultural knowledge and innovation exchange, has become stronger. The cooperation between researchers, advisors, farmers, and other types of actors, as well as the exchange of agricultural knowledge and the need for innovative solutions have been gaining momentum, namely through the EIP-AGRI.

As emphasised in the EU Communication on the Future of Food and Farming, access to reliable, relevant, and new knowledge varies widely across the EU, impacting the overall competitiveness and development potential of the agricultural and forestry sectors and rural areas. Therefore, the exchange of knowledge and the focus on innovation is a cross-cutting objective for the new CAP: a well-functioning AKIS Strategy will contribute to all the specific objectives of the CAP and ensure a high flow of knowledge among its actors, creating significant added value for the sector.

Within this context, advisors will be of key relevance. According to the new CAP legislation advisors received new roles, covering a broader spectrum and need to be integrated within the AKIS in an inclusive way. Advisors need to be able to cover economic, environmental, and social dimensions and to deliver up-to-date technological and scientific information developed by R&I, and therefore they need to collaborate.

The overall aim of this seminar was to support Member States (MSs) in the implementation of their AKIS Strategic Plans, namely by promoting efficient knowledge and innovation flows across the EU, starting by the national level, and going beyond. The seminar focused on exchanging experiences and inspiring examples, as well as sharing plans in organising and supporting effective knowledge creation and exchange between the different AKIS actors.



## Questions discussed in the breakout groups

The breakout groups were prepared in the weeks before the seminar by asking participants to reply to a number of questions. A summary of these questions was presented before each breakout group. This brought the interaction in the groups to a higher level, as participants had already discussed with colleagues at home or looked up information on beforehand, making them more knowledgeable even before the event.

Questions:

### 1. On AKIS coordination approaches:

- › How the AKIS is coordinated in your country? Where is the formal AKIS coordination body, as mentioned in your CAP plan, located?
- › Which actors are involved in the AKIS coordination How do these actors interact with each other? Are there new structures in place?
- › How is the AKIS coordination body resourced (staffing)? How frequently are interactions foreseen in order to get feedback on the functioning of the AKIS coordination?
- › How does your AKIS Coordination Body plan to engage with the various AKIS actors?
- › How will your AKIS Coordination Body capture feedback from existing networks and organisations on the organisation of knowledge and innovation actions?

### 2. On involvement, roles and interactions of key AKIS actors:

- › How are researchers and Horizon National Contact Points engaging with farmers/foresters, advisory and innovation support services to develop practical solutions?
- › How are advisors and researchers incentivised/supported to work together?
- › How are researchers incentivised/supported to share their research findings with advisors, farmers or foresters and wider society?
- › How are researchers and Horizon National Contact Points engaging with farmers/foresters, advisory and innovation support services to develop practical solutions?

### 3. On interlinkages between AKIS interventions and instruments to increase knowledge flows:

- › Describe how you will improve your AKIS in Member State and what interactions between AKIS interventions did you make?
- › What specific tools, instruments, structures and interventions have you developed/plan to develop to support better knowledge exchange and innovation (e.g. more demand driven training, broader scope and better promotion of training and skill building, knowledge hubs/teams, experiences and results from operational



groups presented to farmers as part of the group's project, or used in training/advice)?

#### 4. On integrating advisors within the AKIS and their related roles:

- › What is foreseen in your CAP Strategic Plan to further integrate advisors into the AKIS in your country?
- › Are there Innovation Support Services in your country?
- › How are advisors organised in your country? How will farmers/ foresters / rural entrepreneurs be informed about the available advisors, their competences and fields of expertise, and how will they be able to contact them? How are advisors made visible to farmers / foresters / rural entrepreneurs?
- › Are advisors provided with a regular training, including brokering for innovation?
- › Tell us about your back-offices/specialist advisors and knowledge reservoirs for practice in your country, and how they are organised?
- › Is there a system of vouchers for the use of advice/knowledge actions in your country?

**Key follow-up actions** include promoting the detailed conference results (when available) through the EU CAP Network, the Subgroup on Innovation and Knowledge Exchange (SolKE). The material will stay available for any presentation or encounter in the future and will provide a great basis when explaining the AKIS Strategy and its interventions to any kind of interested person, from whatever hierarchical level.

**All results from the seminar, including the final agenda, participants list, speaker and facilitator bios, background policy documents, and all presentations can be found [on the event page on the EU CAP Network website](#).**

