

Speaker and facilitator bios

Plenary speakers (in order of the programme)

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Wolfgang Burtscher

Director-General of DG Agriculture and Rural Development, European Commission

Wolfgang Burtscher has been Director-General of DG Agriculture and Rural Development since April 2020.

From 2009 to 2020 he was Deputy Director-General in the Directorate-General for Research and Innovation of the European Commission and in that function he was responsible for wide range of research and innovation policy development and implementation issues including research and innovation in the fields of agriculture, food and health.

From 2000 to 2009, Mr Burtscher was Director in the European Commission's Directorate-General for Agriculture where he was responsible for the provision of legal support to the CAP and quality policy and for the control of agricultural expenditure.

Wolfgang Burtscher is an Austrian citizen and before joining the European Commission in 2000, he was a representative of the federal states in the permanent representation of Austria to the EU.

From 1992 to 1996, Mr Burtscher was a head of department for European affairs in the public administration of Vorarlberg state. From 1990 to 1992, he was a legal advisor for questions relating to the European Economic Area at the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) in Geneva. Between 1983 and 1990, Wolfgang Burtscher was a university assistant and lecturer in public international and European law at the University of Innsbruck.

Wolfgang Burtscher holds a doctorate in law and a qualification from the Institut Européen des Hautes Etudes Internationales in Nice.



Inge Van Oost

European Commission, DG Agriculture and Rural Development

Inge Van Oost is policy officer at the European Commission, DG AGRI. She has initiated the agricultural European Innovation Partnership (EIP-AGRI), with innovation projects strengthening linkages between research policy and rural development policy. As member of the Taskforce "Research and Innovation" she was instrumental in shaping DG AGRI's



research and innovation approach in Horizon 2020 Work Programmes since 2012, and developed the new interactive research project formats "multi-actor approach", "thematic networks" and "advisory networks". Meanwhile, one of her core tasks has become the development and implementation of the policy on Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) as part of the CAP 2023-2027, including essential improvements related to the EIP-AGRI. In her former post at the Commission she was policy officer responsible for cross-compliance, the Farm Advisory System and interlinking with the Rural Development policy. Before that, Inge Van Oost was coordinator of the Flemish demonstration projects, drafting rural development measures and designing the farm advisory system. She was evaluator of many agricultural research projects and member of diverse selection committees. She served the Belgian Secretary-General as coordinator of the Horticultural Chain, dealing with chain management, food quality, traceability and safety, sustainability of production methods, linkages with consumers and much more. Before joining the administration, she worked as a farm advisor, and as the coordinator of the advisory team. Based in an applied research institute, the team did not only advise farmers, but also brokered for innovation and implemented multi-actor projects and on-farm demonstrations.

Natalia Brzezina

European Commission, DG Agriculture and Rural Development



Natalia Brzezina is a research programme officer who contributes to setting up the EU agricultural research and innovation strategy, implemented through two policies, i.e., Horizon Europe (Cluster 6) and Common Agricultural Policy, working in synergy under the umbrella of the European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability (EIP-AGRI). In her role, she focuses on strengthening Agriculture Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) at EU level under Horizon Europe. Before joining the European Commission, she did a PhD at the KU Leuven exploring food systems in the European context within the EU-funded project TRANSMANGO. In addition to her scientific background, she managed family farm and gathered professional experience in the agri-food industry. Throughout her education and career, she has gained an in-depth understanding of the sustainability challenges that actors across food systems face on the ground and has always been passionate about empowering them with innovative solutions.





Elena-Teodora Miron

Austrian Chamber of Agriculture | Austrian Rural Educational Institute | modernAKIS

Elena-Teodora Miron is a computer scientist and business engineer who worked for 18 years in research at the University of Vienna as well as in a software engineering company. She specialises in conceptual models, knowledge engineering/AI and networked organisations.

Since 2020 she is in charge of the service point for international projects at the Austrian Chamber of Agriculture. Since starting she has helped the extension service in the Chambers build up an international applied research portfolio and has driven capacity development within the federal Chambers.

She is the principal investigator in Austria for the FAIRShare project focusing on digital/automated tools for extension service. Since 2022 she is the coordinator of the modernAKIS project, a Horizon Europe 7-year project, focused on systems innovation and capacity building for the improvement of AKIS in all Member States.



Helena Pärenson

Ministry of Rural Affairs, Estonia

Helena Pärenson is the Advisor for Knowledge Exchange at the Research and Development Department, Ministry of Rural Affairs, Estonia.

Her main area of responsibilities is related to the planning and programming of strategies and policies in the field of knowledge exchange, advisory services and AKIS in general. Previously she has worked in the domain of agricultural research cooperation and innovation, acting as the National Contact Point and Governing Board member of several ERA-NETs, etc, coordinating national funding programmes for applied research. She has also gained a solid background in managing various international cooperation projects (Erasmus, Leonardo da Vinci, Interreg, EU Framework Programme, etc). She participates in the SCAR AKIS working group and represents the Ministry in the Subgroup of Innovation and Knowledge Exchange.



Petra Hanulikova

Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Slovak Republic

Petra Hanulikova is responsible for knowledge-transfer measure and implementing AKIS in Slovakia. She is working as a programme manager at Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Slovak Republic, where they are facing a new challenge - to implement well-working AKIS with all actors involved.





Ewa Grodzka
Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Poland

Ewa Grodzka is the Head of Knowledge Transfer and Advisory Unit in the Department of Innovation, Digital Affairs and Knowledge Transfer. She has been working for the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development for almost 25 years in different departments and on various positions. Most of her professional life she has been engaged in programming, managing, monitoring and evaluation of rural development programmes, starting with SAPARD (pre-accession programme). In 2015 she joined department responsible for advisory services and training of farmers and advisors. She was involved in implementation of RDP's measures related to knowledge transfer and advisory services, since 2020 as the Managing Authority for these measures. In the framework of the CAP Plan, she is also responsible for interventions concerning knowledge transfer and information as well as the cross-cutting objective related to fostering and sharing knowledge. Her unit is also indicated as the Coordination Body for AKIS. Being a member of the SCAR Strategic Working Group dealing with AKIS, she has become a co-chair of the group since the beginning of this year.



Maite Ambrós Mendioroz
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Spain |
Manager of AKIS-related interventions at supra-regional
level in the Spanish CAP Strategic Plans

Holding a Master's degree in Agricultural Engineering at the Polytechnic University of Madrid and a Master's degree in Evaluation of Public Policies and Programs from the Complutense University of Madrid, she has been a civil servant in the Spanish Central Administration since 2003. After a brief period in the private sector working on research in terrestrial ecotoxicology, she began her career in public service in the Organic Production Area of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, to later focus on the design and management of competitive bidding frameworks for civil society projects in the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation, in the Non Profit Organization's Department.

She is currently Head of the unit of Innovation and Digitization, within the DG for Rural Development, Innovation and Agrifood Training of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. This unit is responsible for promoting agri-food technological entrepreneurship and all kinds of innovations, among other mechanisms, through grants for supra-autonomous operational groups of the European Innovation Association for agricultural productivity and sustainability (EIP-Agri) as well as



the focal point for the development of the Digitalization Strategy of the agri-food and sector and the rural areas. The unit is also an Spanish representative in the Subgroup on Innovation and Knowledge Exchange, in the SCAR AKIS, and it is in charge of the design and promotion of the AKIS Coordination Body of Spain.



Sarah Watson

Support facility for Innovation and Knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI – Lead facilitator

Sarah believes in the power of community and has over 20 years' experience as a facilitator bringing people together to share, explore and create innovative solutions. She works across Europe with a focus on rural areas, their challenges and the opportunities they bring. Her early career included working as a researcher for Bournemouth University's Centre for Land Based Studies whose focus included organic farming. She has also managed two LEADER programme and has had the pleasure of working in a European context ever since. She now runs her own facilitation and innovation consultancy, working with communities to aspire and realise change.



Mark Gibson

Support facility for Innovation and Knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI

Mark Gibson is Head of the Teagasc KT Outreach and Innovation Department which supports the Irish AKIS through knowledge exchange programmes, communications, events and online tools. Prior to this, Mark worked as an Environment Specialist with Teagasc, where he led a number of national ICT projects supporting agri-environmental schemes. His work has also included the coordination of climate change and the water quality policy submissions and the development of sustainable knowledge transfer programmes. He is host of the popular "Signpost" farm sustainability webinar series which is broadcast on a weekly basis.

He is a graduate of University College Dublin and holds a Bachelor of Agricultural Science and a Masters in Environmental Resource Management.





Jan van Esch

Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and food quality, the Netherlands

Jan van Esch is Senior knowledge and innovation advisor at the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and food quality in the Netherlands. Co-chair of the AKIS Strategic Working group under SCAR, SCAR plenary and preparation team for CAP in the Netherlands.

Jan van Esch works since 1992 at the ministry of Agriculture in the Netherlands in the field of Agriculture, knowledge and innovation, with focus on EU activities. Part of his work is to prepare the new CAP policy and CAP transition period concerning knowledge, innovation, network and digital strategy. Within the European Standing Committee on Agricultural research he is cochairing the AKIS working group and part of the team representing Netherlands in SCAR plenary and Horizon Europe program comity. In the Netherlands his task is to connect the research institutes better to the political needs. Specially in the field of European cooperation.

Jan van Esch graduated from Wageningen University in 1989 on phytopathology and 32 years of experience in knowledge and innovation in various position from the research lab to the field.



Els Lapage

Department of Agriculture and Fisheries of the Flemish Government, Belgium

Els works for the Managing Authority of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries of the Flemish Government in Belgium. She has a master in Agricultural Engineering. Els is coordinator of the agricultural innovation measures, and is responsible for aligning and improving the knowledge and innovation measures financed by the department (vocational training, advice, demonstration projects, EIP, innovative investments). Furthermore, she's responsible for the Flemish investment support for practical research organisations in Flanders. She is a member of selection committees for the evaluation of agricultural research or demonstration projects. In her former post at the department she was director of the extension service, building bridges between research, policy and practice. Before joining the administration, she worked as a researcher at successively University Ghent and a practical research institute, and after a while as an editor of a vegetable grower journal spreading the results of the Flemish practical research.





Florian Herzog
Austrian Chamber of Agriculture, Advisory services coordination

Florian Herzog holds bachelor degrees in Environmental System Sciences and in Agrarian Pedagogy and a master's degree in Natural Resources Management & Ecological Engineering. He started his professional career as a research fellow at the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences Vienna (BOKU). Working in applied research projects in the field of entrepreneurship and innovation capacity building among rural communities formed the basis for his keen interest in the drivers of transformational change and rural development.

For more than a decade Florian Herzog is working in advisory services coordination at the Austrian chamber of agriculture, currently as head of unit 'knowledge transfer & innovation' which is actively involved in several AKIS-related projects on national and European level, such as modernAKIS, EU-Farmbook, ATTRACTISS. Applying his expertise in methods and instruments of knowledge transfer and promoting interactive innovation, his current focus of interest lies on farm business management, digitization of agriculture and agricultural innovation systems. Florian is representing the Austrian advisory services in several working groups and bodies on EU-level and is an active member of the advisory networks IALB and EUFRAS.



Carola Ketelhodt
Chamber of Agriculture in Schleswig-Holstein, EIP Agrar Innovation Office

Carola Ketelhodt is head of the EIP Agri Support Service for Schleswig-Holstein on behalf of the Ministry in Kiel. Carola studied at Christian-Albrechts-University in Kiel agricultural economics. After graduation as Agricultural Engineer she launched her career as trainer on an institution of rural adult education. From 1997 to 2013 she was managing director in northern Germany of "Bioland" an association of organic farmers. In 2013 Carola started working at the Chamber of Agriculture with organic farmers. Since July 2014 she is responsible for the innovation support unit. She believes in the bottom-up approach to identify practice-relevant innovation ideas for and with agriculture. Carola is convinced that working with multi-stakeholder groups is particularly suitable for implementing innovations. She is supporting the EIP process in SH, is working as advisor for innovators and Operational Groups and as innovation-network-manager. This includes as well information exchange, knowledge transfer, and active public relations within the EIP Agricultural Network in Europe.





Patrizia Proietti

**Council for Agricultural Research and Economics –
 Research Centre for Agricultural Policies and
 Bioeconomy (CREA – PB)**

Patrizia Proietti is a researcher at CREA-PB. She has more than 20 years of experience in the field of programming, monitoring and evaluating European and National Policies. Her main domain of expertise is rural development policy with a focus on agricultural knowledge and innovation systems, advisory services, innovation dynamics. She is scientific coordinator of the project ATTRACTISS and is involved in the projects modernAKIS, EU-FarmBook, i2connect, as well.



Hugo Almeida

**European Commission, DG Agriculture and Rural
 Development**

Hugo Almeida finalised his studies in economics in 1997 and after a first working experience in the private sector in Portugal, decided to try an international career. In 2000, during the Portuguese Presidency of the European Council becomes a trainee in the recently created Co-decision unit. In the second half of 2000 starts working in the United Nations Mission Interim in Kosovo (UNMIK) as Budget and Finance Officer where he stayed until end of 2002. In 2003 he joins the European Commission and starts working in the Budget unit of DG AGRI where he stayed for seven years and worked in different files like direct management expenditure and direct aids. In 2010 moves to the Direct aids unit where among other things is appointed as Head of the Single Payment Scheme sector. In 2013 is appointed Deputy Head of the Unit responsible for the Rural development programs of Spain and Portugal where he stayed until January 2022. Currently he is Deputy Head in the unit "Rural areas and Networks" which is responsible for the implementation of the Long-term vision for EU's rural areas, the networking activities related with the implementation of the CAP strategic Plans, innovation and knowledge exchange as well as the horizontal coordination within DG AGRI in the area of broadband.



EU CAP Network Team

1. Support Facility 'Innovation & Knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI' team



Pacôme Elouna Eyenga

Team Leader

Pacôme Elouna Eyenga is Belgian and was born in Yaoundé, Cameroon. He graduated as agronomist in the field of rural economy and sociology, at Gembloux Agro-Bio Tech / Université de Liège in Belgium. Since July 2021, he is the Team Leader of the Support Facility for 'Innovation & Knowledge Exchange | EIP-AGRI'. From 2013 until May 2021, he has been Deputy Team Leader and then Team Leader of the EIP-AGRI Service Point established by the European Commission - DG AGRI.



Rasa Pakeltiene

Task Manager

Rasa is Knowledge and Innovation Officer at the EIP-AGRI Support facility. She works as associated professor at the Bioeconomy Development Faculty of Vytautas Magnus University (VMU), and is AKIS activities coordinator at the Business and Social Partnership Center of VMU. Since 2014 she is editor-in-chief of the scientific journal "Management theories and studies for rural business and infrastructure development".

As a researcher, she has published over twenty scientific publications in the field of rural development, innovation assessment methodologies, social partnership, rural social infrastructure, environmental management, etc. With co-authors she has published three research and study books. She is working on national and international research and study projects and is an active member of scientific associations and thematic networks.



Margarida Ambar

Facilitator

Margarida Ambar is one of the Knowledge and Innovation officers in the EIP-AGRI Support Facility, and her main tasks are related to AKIS, networking and stakeholders management. Margarida Ambar studied Agricultural Engineering at the Technical University of Lisbon and has a master in territorial management, focusing on stakeholders' involvement. She worked for over 20 years for the Portuguese Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and then as part of the EIP-AGRI Service Point from 2013 until 2021. Prior to that, she had already gained experience in international cooperation projects and networks aiming at knowledge exchange.





Sergiu Didicescu
Facilitator

Sergiu has a background in oenology and agri-environmental economics. He started professional life as an oenologist in the ‘Dealu Mare’ area, one of Romania’s largest wine producing regions. Later, he joined Romania’s Rural Development Managing Authority where he was responsible for programming the agri-environmental measures for Romania’s first RDP. Since 2013 Sergiu works for the EIP-AGRI Support Facility currently as Head of Division C “Environment and Climate”.



Albin Hunia
Facilitator

Albin Hunia is a facilitator/moderator and EU Interreg advisor from the Netherlands, working for the public/state-level Netherlands Enterprise Agency RVO. He is part of the EIP-AGRI/EU CAP NETWORK support team. With a MSc in Biology, he has a 20+ years background in rural development projects management and EU cooperation projects.



Céline Karasinski
Facilitator

From 2014-2021 she was policy officer for EIP-AGRI Service Point. She is working non-permanent for the EIP-AGRI Support Facility. She works since 2009 for Chamber of Agriculture network in France. She was involved in rural development. From June 2017 to March 2020, she managed a LEADER programme in her country and facilitated a Local Action Group. Since 2019, she works as facilitator for the Nouvelle-Aquitaine Regional Rural Network. In this unit, she is responsible for the organisation of meetings and conferences, coordination of working groups and help to the cooperation projects of the Local Action Group. She participates in the French rural network’s meetings and conferences. Céline Karasinski is Agricultural engineer, specialist of environment and ecology; she studied at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure d’Agronomie of Toulouse (France).



Liisa Kubarsepp
Facilitator

Liisa is working in the EU CAP Network since 2022, mainly focusing on the stakeholder’s database and website. She previously worked in the EIP-AGRI Service Point from 2017-2021 as facilitator in different events and as task manager for the Focus Groups on soil contamination and plastic use in



agriculture, as well as task manager for the workshop on shaping the EU Soil Mission and co-task manager for the seminar on soil health. She has a degree in plant biology from the University of Tartu and is currently pursuing a PhD in agriculture at the Estonian University of Life Sciences. She also works in the Centre of Estonian Rural Research and Knowledge (METK) innovation service where her task is to foster innovation in the agricultural sector in Estonia.

Antanas Maziliauskas

Facilitator

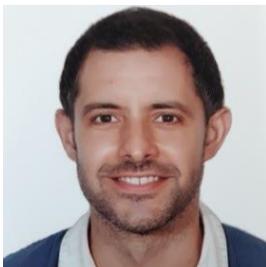


Antanas Maziliauskas, is since March 2023 the Deputy Team Leader of the Innovation and Knowledge exchange/EIP-AGRI Support Facility, linking research and practice. He has been in the EIP-AGRI SF since 2021. He was task manager of the Focus Group on Biodiversity on farmland and co-task manager of the Focus group on Nature-based solutions for water management. He also contributed to other activities dealing with climate change, natural resources, and biodiversity.

He has a professional background and PhD in environmental engineering with a focus on water management. Before joining the EIP-AGRI SF he had many leading and expert positions in academic and public institutions and business (i.e. rector of Aleksandras Stulginskis university in Lithuania, heading Department of Agriculture and Food at the Lithuanian ministry of agriculture, CEO of consulting company “Projektu gama”, etc.), but what he really enjoys are the many projects and missions related to natural resources, water management, irrigation and drainage, water supply and wastewater treatment in the Baltic Sea region, in Africa, Latin America and Asia.

Quico Onega

Facilitator



Since April 2013 Quico works part-time as Science and Research Officer at the EIP-AGRI Support Facility (previously Service Point). He has been dealing with topics related to the digitalization of agriculture as well as sustainable ruminant production systems. Besides, he works as project manager at the Land Laboratory of the University of Santiago de Compostela in the realm of spatial planning and land and rural policies. Together with his wife, he runs an organic sheep farm.





Tine Defour
Communications

As part of the Support Facility's communication team, Tine writes and coordinates brochures and other publications, including the yearly *Agrinnovation* magazine. She loves whipping words into publishable shape. She contributes to the contents of the website and the EU CAP Network newsletter on Innovation & Knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI, and she offers support for events.

From 2014 to 2021, she was a member of the EIP-AGRI Service Point team. Tine has an academic background, with a PhD in English linguistics. From 2003 to 2014 she was a researcher and lecturer at Ghent University (BE), where she gained experience in international networking and in organising events. During that time she also worked as editorial assistant and proofreader for a peer-reviewed academic journal.

2. Communications and Events Support

Francesco Aiello
Travel & logistical support



After years working on making events happen on the ground as a steward, Francesco joined the EU CAP Network - Communication and Logistical Support Team.

He also brings with him the volunteer experience at the International Short Movie Festival CinemàCinemà as part of the event organisers and as Art Director.

Anne-Fleur Labbé
Travel & logistical support



Anne-Fleur, Associate Partner at Phrenos, is a multilingual professional with 15+ years of experience in events and communication. She is currently the Project Manager & Secretariat Team Leader of the 'European Green Capital and European Green Leaf Awards' Secretariat and Network Support (DG ENV) and Events Team Leader for the Logistical & Communication Support for Networking Activities of the CAP (Lot 4) for DG AGRI. She is also the Account & Event Manager of the 'Professional Event Management Services Framework contract' for BEREC, and for a Communication & Events Services Long-Term Agreement for UNICEF.

She graduated from the London School of Economics with a MSc in History of International Relations, and from Université Paris II – Panthéon Assas with a MSc in Banking & Finance. In 2020, at INSEAD, she completed a certification in Design Thinking and Creativity for Business, and in 'Leadership in a Crisis'. She speaks French, English, Italian, and German.



Sophie Plattard**Travel & logistical support**

Sophie is an experienced event professional with a strong interest in communication and international politics. Based in Brussels, she joined the EU CAP Network – Communication and Logistical Support – in May 2022 as an event organiser. She holds a Master of Arts in Conflict, Security and Development, as well as a Bachelor's degree in German and History.

Curious about meeting new people and culture, Sophie has lived in Austria, England and Germany. In her spare time, she loves swimming and going for walks in the forest.

