

EUROPEAN
EVALUATION
HELPDESK



REPORT

HOW TO ASSESS AKIS BASED ON LESSONS LEARNED FROM 2014-2020

GOOD PRACTICE WORKSHOP
ONLINE, 30-31MAY 2022

Copyright notice

© European Union, 2022

Reproduction is authorised provided the source is acknowledged.

Recommended citation:

EUROPEAN COMMISSION – Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development – Unit A.3 (2022): How to assess AKIS based on lessons learned from 2014-2022. Report of the Good Practice Workshop 30-31 June 2022. Online.

Disclaimer:

The information and views set out in this report are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the Commission. The Commission does not guarantee the accuracy of the data included in this report. Neither the Commission nor any person acting on the Commission's behalf may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained therein.



The European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP is responsible for providing support to monitoring and evaluation activities at the EU and Member State level. It works under the guidance of DG AGRI's Unit A.3 'Policy Performance' of the European Commission (EC). The European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP supports all evaluation stakeholders, in particular DG AGRI, national authorities, managing authorities and evaluators, through the development and dissemination of appropriate methodologies and tools; the collection and exchange of good practices; capacity building and communicating with network members on evaluation related topics.

Additional information about the activities of European Evaluation Helpdesk the CAP is available on the Internet through the Europa server (<http://enrd.ec.europa.eu>).

REPORT

HOW TO ASSESS AKIS BASED ON LESSONS
LEARNED FROM 2014-2020

GOOD PRACTICE WORKSHOP
ONLINE, 30-31 MAY 2022

CONTENTS

LIST OF ACRONYMS ii

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 1

1 SETTING THE FRAME 2

1.1 Introduction 2

1.2 Overview of the AKIS innovation ecosystem 3

2 SHARING EXPERIENCES..... 5

2.1 Day 1 – Examples of evaluations of cooperation and of knowledge exchange and advisory services 5

 2.1.1 Experience from Finland 5

 2.1.2 Experiences from Italy, Spain, Latvia, and the Netherlands..... 6

2.2 Day 2 - Example of an ongoing evaluation of innovation and wider experiences 7

 2.2.1 Experience from Sweden 7

 2.2.2 Experience from the EU-level 9

 2.2.3 Experience from the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)..... 10

3 CONCLUDING REMARKS 12

ANNEX 1 – Outcome of group discussions on Day 1 14

ANNEX 2 – Results of the Mentimeter feedback poll 18

TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Participants of the Good Practice Workshop per role and Member State.....3

LIST OF ACRONYMS

AIS	Agricultural Innovation Systems
AKIS	Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CCO	Cross-cutting objectives
EIP	European Innovation Partnership
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
FAS	Farming Advisory Services
GPW	Good Practise Workshops
EU	European Union
MA	Managing Authorities
MS	Member States
LMIC	Low and medium income countries
NRN	National Rural Networks
OG	Operational Group
PA	Paying Agency
RDP	Rural Development Programme

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The first Good Practice Workshop (GPW) of the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP 'How to assess AKIS based on lessons learned from 2014-2020', took place online on 30-31 May 2022. The assessment of AKIS is a topic of high relevance in the post 2020 programming period, due to the important role that knowledge, innovation and digitalisation are expected to play in the modernisation of the agricultural sector. The GPW brought together 105 participants from 24 different EU Member States, including CAP Strategic Plan Managing Authorities (MAs), evaluators, European Commission representatives, Paying Agencies, researchers, network organisations such as National Rural Networks (NRN), and other evaluation stakeholders.

The overall objective of the workshop was to reflect on experiences and lessons in relation to the assessment of AKIS elements with a view to preparing Member States for future CAP evaluations of AKIS. Specifically, it aimed at:

- a) exchanging practical experiences from the 2014-2020 period on how specific AKIS elements have been assessed up to now, notably, innovation, knowledge transfer, advisory services and cooperation (case studies from Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands, Spain and Sweden were presented, as well as a case study from an EU level evaluation);
- b) sharing experiences of AKIS evaluations from outside the CAP (two case studies from the FAO were presented), with a view to identify relevant evaluation approaches for AKIS;
- c) exploring the scope for evaluating AKIS and identifying ideas on what and how to assess AKIS (through group discussions).

These experiences reached interesting findings, such the importance of mutual understanding, trust, and cooperation among the various stakeholders or the role of the innovation broker for making these connections. Also the importance of strengthening information flows between farmers and researchers, farmers and advisors and researchers and advisors is essential for a well-functioning AKIS.

They also offered useful lessons for the assessment of AKIS in the context of the new CAP:

- Common understanding of AKIS is critical before the start of the evaluation process. AKIS is about bringing together people, organisations, and institutions who produce, share and use knowledge and innovation for agriculture and interrelated fields. Connecting with each other, working together and not in silos will contribute to the creation of an innovative ecosystem. The different pace of development of AKIS structures and different connections intensities also need to be taken into account when designing evaluations and defining their objectives.
- Concerning methods for evaluating AKIS, qualitative evaluations of AKIS based on theory-based approaches may be pertinent for short/medium term outcomes when evaluations take place at early stages of the implementation of CAP Strategic Plans. When analysing long-term outcomes (impacts), quantitative analysis can be applied, bearing in mind however that there needs to be a structured way to collect data from the beginning of the programming period, while also ensuring access to it. However, measuring the impact of innovation is very difficult and the 'theory of change' can be considered also for impacts. Ongoing learning evaluation is an approach that could be used when introducing new AKIS measures (e.g. the AKIS actions in the new CAP) or when there is limited knowledge on the topic available in the implementing body.
- The evaluators of AKIS can get inspired by the pioneering work of the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organisation) in applying a multi-perspective analysis of Agricultural Innovation Systems (AIS), including a functional perspective (functions of the AIS), a structural perspective (interactions between actors, networks and infrastructures), a capacity building perspective and a process perspective (pathways of change, enabling environment for innovation). The use of harmonised indicator frameworks that address the complexity of the AIS can also be an inspiration for evidence-based evaluations.

1 SETTING THE FRAME

1.1 Introduction

The first Good Practice Workshop (GWP) of this programming period of the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP (Evaluation Helpdesk) focused the assessment of AKIS, a topic of high relevance in the post 2020 programming period, due to the important role that knowledge, innovation and digitalisation are expected to play in the modernisation of the agricultural sector.

The promotion of knowledge, innovation and digitalisation in agriculture and rural areas is a cross-cutting objective (Article 6(2) of Regulation (EU) No 2021/2115¹) of the Common Agricultural Policy for 2023-2027, seeking the modernisation of the sector. Whereas in the 2014-2022 period the focus was on funding impactful innovation projects, in the 2023-2027 period there is attention for the complete innovation ecosystem, including project funding but also stimulating innovation supporting services². The overarching aim of CAP modernisation is the long-term supply of nutritious food and biomass and the achievement of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. To this end, knowledge and innovation (including tackling the digital divide) through a well-functioning AKIS in Member States will play a key role.

There are three key elements of the cross-cutting objective (CCO)³ which interrelate and positively affect each other:

- 1) intensive knowledge exchange
- 2) enhanced scope and improved competence of advisors within the AKIS
- 3) co-creating innovation projects and sharing the outcomes as broad as possible

CAP Strategic Plans will contribute to the CCO through the farm advisory services (Article 15), the innovation related activities of CAP Networks (Article 126), the EIP-AGRI and its Operational Groups (Article 127) and interventions like knowledge exchange, advice and information (Article 78) and cooperation (Article 77). The combination of these interventions will contribute to the so-called innovation ecosystem, the AKIS (as defined in Art 3).

The assessment of AKIS in the new CAP acquires therefore particular importance as the backbone of the CAP modernisation. Both for ex post evaluation of AKIS in the current period and the CAP 2023-2027 evaluations the rationale of this good practice workshop is threefold:

- To draw lessons from existing AKIS evaluations at EU and MS level.
- To draw lessons from AKIS evaluations from outside the EU.
- Bridging the gap between current state of play and future needs on evaluating AKIS.

The GPW-01 focused on **reflecting on experiences and lessons in relation to the assessment of AKIS elements** with a view to preparing Member States for future CAP evaluations of AKIS.

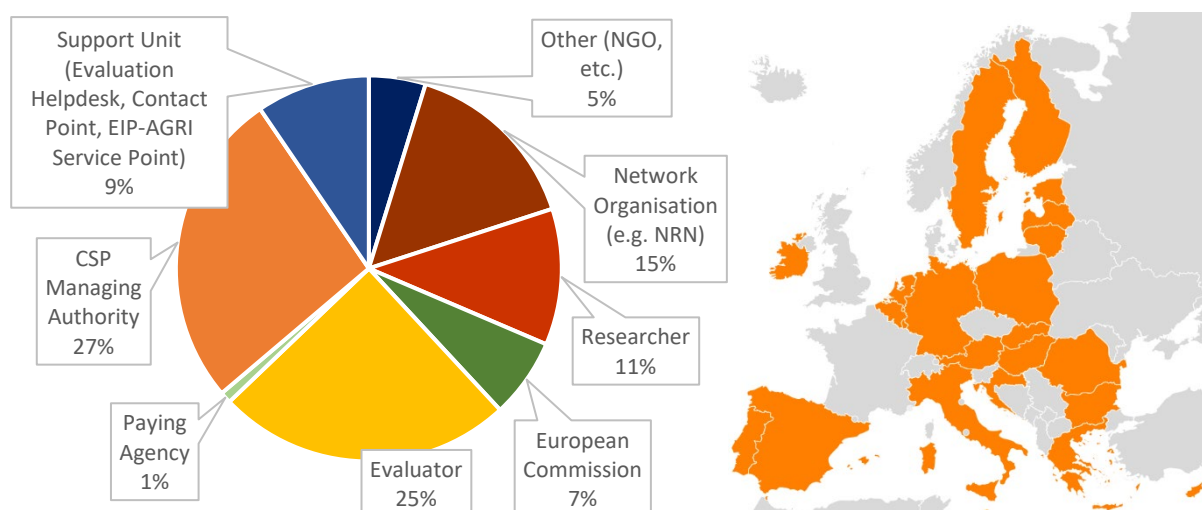
105 participants from 24 different EU Member States attended the online event across the two days, including CSP Managing Authorities (MAs), evaluators, European Commission representatives, paying agencies, researchers, network organisations such as National Rural Networks (NRN), and other evaluation stakeholders.

¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021R2115&from=EN>

² Art 15(4)(e) obligation.

See also Preparing for future AKIS in Europe, Standing Committee on Agricultural Research (SCAR) 4th Report of the Strategic Working Group on AKIS (2019)

³ Tool 8.1 Tool for the CAP Cross-Cutting Objective (2021)

Figure 1. Participants of the Good Practice Workshop per role and Member State

1.2 Overview of the AKIS innovation ecosystem

Ms Inge van Oost (DG AGRI Unit D.1) presented an overview of AKIS innovation ecosystem and conceptualised the different types of AKIS interventions. During her presentation, Ms van Oost emphasised that it is important to show the elements that make AKIS important, useful, and necessary to fund. It is a challenge to assess in how far knowledge innovations really impact and change the behaviour of the farmers (i.e. attribution of tangible impacts).

AKIS is about bringing together people, organisations, and institutions who use and produce knowledge and innovation for agriculture and interrelated fields, and making sure they work together or, at least, have the connections to find each other. The overall aim is to create an innovative eco-system and where people do not work in silos. One needs to be aware that the A in AKIS is not just about agriculture, but also covers forestry, environment, climate, landscape, biodiversity, rural areas, social innovation, consumers and citizens, food distribution chains, social health, etc. Do not forget the cross-cutting objective (CCO), which aims to cover economic, environmental, and social objectives. The final aim is implementation in practice and classical research is hardly able to have an impact on the ground, unless combined with knowledge flows between experts/researchers and practice.

AKISs in Europe are vastly different: some AKISs are fragmented and others are well-connected; some AKISs are weaker than others because they are not well-funded; some AKISs stay within silos which is detrimental for their development. This shows that there is a need for flexible approaches, so that everyone can move ahead at their own pace with their AKIS.

The principles for AKIS are exactly the same as for EIP AGRI Operational Groups: the interactive innovation model is followed which promotes collaboration with complementary actors to co-create from the beginning until the end of a project and within the AKIS ecosystem. This means quicker spreading of solutions and opportunities, and making sure that they are ready to implement into practice.

There are four main strands of AKIS: enhancing knowledge flows, strengthening advisory services, incentivise interactive innovation projects, and supporting effective digital tools supporting AKIS knowledge flows in agriculture.

Link to the PPT: [Elements of a well-functioning AKIS, including EIP-AGRI and advisors integrated within AKIS](#). The presentation should be seen as a simplified booklet for reading through all the different types of AKIS interventions in order to understand its complexity.

Further useful material: [Tool 8.1 Tool for the CAP Cross-Cutting Objective \(CCO\)](#)

After the presentation, participants posed the following questions to the presenter:

<p>The projects, which are called EIP-OG in official form, are in a better position to be involved in EIP-Agri activities (focus groups, workshops etc.) or in Horizon Europe consortia. The innovation and collaboration happen elsewhere too (in the same level or in a better level). The others are "repressed".</p> 	<p><i>Ms Van Oost responded that the Operational Group (OG) principle has been very successful and all MS have an opportunity to join and all but one did so in the current RDP period. For non-EIP OGs, the European Commission cannot grasp if they are really OGs applying the interactive innovation model, and not just a way to get access to the Horizon Europe programme. The Commission wants to fully make use of the advantages that were built over multiple years for the OGs and share them with as many MS as possible.</i></p>
<p>Why does AKIS in your understanding have no interfaces with national and regional innovation systems, which have existed for many years? Why is it such a sectoral issue?</p>	<p><i>Ms Van Oost explained that in section eight of the CAP Strategic Plans, information on the whole AKIS is being asked, which includes national or regional projects, organisations and networks. Sometimes, these may need a little push for structuring knowledge flows within an interconnected system of knowledge and innovation flows. For instance, Sweden explained in a ten-pager what is done at national and regional level, but interlinking of knowledge hubs and advisors is required; when more information was provided by Sweden, the Commission was able to understand the situation.</i></p> <p><i>Furthermore, Ms Van Oost explained that she does not see AKIS as a sectoral issue, as all the specific objectives are linked and also cross-sectoral issues are equally important for AKIS (e.g. circular economy, social innovation, rural area development etc).</i></p>
<p>The effectiveness of AKIS also depends on the willingness of farmers to take on the advice, engage in research and innovation, etc. However, there may be instances where this may be limited due to specific conditions such as the size of holdings.</p>	<p><i>Ms Van Oost responded that this is the problem with all advisory measures: the so-called hard to reach people. Some countries are trying to tackle it but there is not one golden solution. Slowly new approaches are arising to tackle this issue, which are often built on more collaboration among the small farmers and using group approaches, accompanied with digital learning tools.</i></p>

2 SHARING EXPERIENCES

2.1 Day 1 – Examples of evaluations of cooperation and of knowledge exchange and advisory services

2.1.1 Experience from Finland

Ms Sari Rannanpää (evaluator, Finland) presented an evaluation conducted in Finland from 2017 to 2019 on Farm Advisory Services (FAS). It was proven to be quite an effective evaluation, as the Finnish Managing Authority took the recommendations on board during the previous programming period, as well as for the new CAP Strategic Plan. The evaluation covered the supply and demand of the FAS as well as the implementation: the system, the advisors, and the farms. The evaluation discovered a variety of elements, one of which being that the advisors, especially the specialised ones, are not spread evenly around the country. Also, the FAS was very useful for spreading knowledge (esp. technical knowledge) to farmers, but searching for new information was left to the farm advisors or farm advisory companies. Due to challenges in obtaining data at farm level, some quantitative elements of the evaluation could not be implemented. The main issue encountered during the evaluation was that FAS has mainly indirect impacts; one cannot outright state that a visit from a farm advisor will lead to a change at farm level. Also, the effects of FAS, training and cooperation measures are difficult to separate from each other. To this effect, an intervention logic for each measure should be created already at the programming phase. This would support the use of theory-based evaluation, which in general would suit the assessment of FAS.

Link to the PPT: [Evaluation of Farm Advisory Services in Finland](#)

After the presentation, participants posed the following questions to the presenter:

It was mentioned that there was missing clarity about the objectives of the various interventions (advice, training, cooperation) because they fulfil different tasks; is this the case in Finland or more in general?



Ms Rannanpää responded that she thinks this is more in general, as there is no clear view about what is supposed to happen. There is no theory of change for the training, FAS, or cooperation measures. For instance, how does EIP differ from group advice? The nuances are very small, which makes it difficult to assess the impact of one specific measure. Namely, one cannot really distinguish the effects of one measure from the effects of another measure. Furthermore, it was discovered during another evaluation that it is not clear how the different capacity-building and knowledge improvement measures contribute to innovation. There are underlying assumptions, but for an evaluator it would be important to understand how they are supposed to work together and what their expected interaction is. We can see interaction but cannot distinguish it.

Is there an idea on what could be done to prepare for collecting quantitative data and conduct a triangulated / mixed approach?

The problem is that although the quantitative data at farm level (e.g. farm economic outcomes) exists, it is difficult and time-consuming to access it, especially if the data would be combined with another farm-level data source. Results on controls were given at an aggregate level. The Paying Agency ran their data on controls against the data on farms that received advice and the ones who did not. The evaluators were given summary information. In general, the data collection should be planned well in advance, preferably at the programming phase.

2.1.2 Experiences from Italy, Spain, Latvia, and the Netherlands

Ms Marili Parissaki (Evaluation Helpdesk) coordinated a panel discussion with Ms Elita Benga (LV), Mr Eduardo Malagon (ES; the Basque Country), Mr Virgilio Buscemi (IT; Tuscany), and Ms Elvira Meurs (NL) on their assessment of Measure 16 – Cooperation. All evaluators conducted an evaluation on this measure in their respective countries, though the Dutch evaluation also includes Measure 1 and the Latvian evaluation also covered Measure 4, 6, and 19. Ms Benga explained that they decided to also include the other measures because all of the measures had the possibility to support projects with innovation, as the aim of the evaluation was to evaluate the compliance of innovation projects. Ms Meurs stated that the Dutch evaluation also included Measure 1 as it overlaps with Measure 16 in accordance with the different phases of innovation, from fundamental research to the recognition of the problems, the recognition of promising innovation, and building capacity for innovation.

Objectives of the evaluations. When looking at the objectives of the various evaluations, Mr Malagon explained that the evaluation in the Basque country focused on the Common Evaluation Questions 1, 2, and 30 related to innovation, while in Latvia they looked at the compliance of innovation projects. In the Netherlands, a follow-up evaluation took place in 2022 to analyse the impact, the lessons learned, and how the recommendations from the 2019 evaluation study were taken up. It was supposed to be an impact evaluations, but it was difficult to evaluate the results as the innovation curve shows that the impact will be visible later on in the process. Mr Buscemi explained that the evaluation is currently ongoing and that it is a thematic report as the region expressed the need to understand how Measure 16 works. The evaluators and the region developed specific evaluation questions to go deeper into this topic and to gather useful suggestions to guide innovation interventions in 2023-2027.

Methods used for the evaluations. Mostly qualitative ones were used (i.e. interviews, desk research, surveys, and workshops). The discussion focused on what prevented the evaluators to use more quantitative methods. Mr Buscemi stated that the topic itself obliged them to move towards the use of a mix of methods, mainly qualitative ones, as the 53 OGs in Tuscany are all very different and there would be a need to do 53 impact evaluations. The best way to appreciate the impact of the evaluation is to collect directly from stakeholders what differences they see before and after the project. Mr Costas Apostolopoulos (Evaluation Helpdesk) posed the question about what could be assessed during the various stages of the implementation and Ms Meurs responded that in the earlier stages a more qualitative method is necessary and that in later stages a quantitative method could be used if the data can be made available. Ms Benga stressed that qualitative evaluations are also necessary in the last phases as people should be pleased with the results achieved: "AKIS is persons coming together and working together".

Challenges encountered by the evaluators while analysing the evaluation findings. There are conceptual, methodological, and data collection challenges. Ms Benga underlined that it was important to keep in mind that one should be sure about the type of data available and what you want to evaluate within the AKIS. Mr Apostolopoulos proposed the idea of creating good practice by taking into account the various findings of the multiple evaluations, and use them to build a theory of change as mentioned in the presentation of Ms Rannanpää. When looking at challenges related to how to assess if farmers incorporated social innovation, Mr Malagon stated that it was hard to evaluate this as processes had a long trajectory so it was difficult to assess the link.

Key recommendations that came out of the evaluations. Ms Meurs stated that they were very pleased to see that their recommendation on the need to distinguish between national and regional needs was taken into account in the Netherlands, and they now see that innovation measures continue with both national and regional calls for projects. Ms Benga underlined the importance of a common understanding and coming together of all stakeholders. Mr Buscemi highlighted the importance of integrated planning as this this approach (*modus operandi*) stimulates interactions among rural actors.

Mr Malagon stressed the need to promote the upscaling of pilot projects so that they spread among more and more farmers.

Terms of References for the evaluators. Ms Benga stated that for setting the vision, objectives and tasks of the evaluation both evaluators/researchers should be asked but also the people on the ground should be involved, though the evaluation of impact is mostly of interest for the MAs.

Lessons for the future from the evaluations of AKIS. Ms Benga reiterated the importance of mutual understanding, trust, and cooperation among the various stakeholders. Mr Malagon underlined the relevance and importance of innovation brokers for making connections among the stakeholders. Ms Meurs stated that measuring impact of innovation is very difficult and the suggested theory of change could be a valuable solution for this.

Link to the presentations:


[Evaluation cluster innovation: Mid-term evaluation in the Netherlands](#) (NL)

[Evaluation of Measure 16: Cooperation](#) (ES)

[Evaluation of measure 16 of the 2014-2020 Tuscany RDP](#) (IT)

[Innovations in Latvian RDP 2014-2020](#) (LV).

After the presentation, participants posed the following questions to the presenters:

 <p>Is it possible to provide us with some examples whether there is any definition or form of legal entity for the innovation broker?</p>	<p><i>Mr Malagon responded that there are no forma/legal entities for the innovation broker: it is a non-formal structure. Staff of various agencies (i.e. public administration, some research centres, and the innovation agency of the Basque Country) were the innovation brokers.</i></p> <p><i>Mr Kudins share that in Tool 8.1, one can find several examples and also links to videos with examples.</i></p>
---	--

A variety of useful links were shared by participants:

- [The EIP-AGRI webpage on innovation support services \(including advisers with a focus on innovation\)](#)
- [A document with ten key challenges in the Spanish AKIS](#)
- [The 4th SCAR report, which has a section \(section 4.3.3\) on explaining innovation brokering](#)
- [A publication on data of farmers' and researchers' perceptions about AKIS in Spain](#) (the document is in Spanish, with a short English abstract):
- [A model to analyse AKIS called '3Cs model': Knowledge, Communication, Change..](#) This was designed in Spain according to the results from more than 300 surveys to farmers and researchers. It includes conclusions of their perceptions about AKIS.

After the presentations, participants continued exchanging experiences and share ideas in group discussions, focusing on what should be evaluated in relation to AKIS, with what evaluation criteria and when as well as the challenges for evaluating AKIS.

2.2 Day 2 - Example of an ongoing evaluation of innovation and wider experiences

2.2.1 Experience from Sweden

Mr Joel Karlsson and Mr Eric Markus, from the Swedish Board of Agriculture, presented an evaluation commissioned by the Swedish Government from 2014 to 2020 on the topic of **ongoing learning evaluation of EIP-AGRI**. Its purpose was to create learning during implementation and lead to opportunities to use this learning for adjustment and development of the programme. The focus was on

administrative aspects such as regulations and implementation, e.g. looking at how selection criteria were used in practice during meetings. This has led, amongst others, to an improved e-application system with less detailed budget planning requirements in applications and clarified roles for the different operational groups involved (support functions, advisory committees and desk officers). Impact evaluation remained difficult. An evaluation early in the programming period can be hampered by limited knowledge and the parallel need to set up the new programme, interventions and IT-systems. The study also raised data concerns, highlighting the importance of having a structured way to collect data, which can support evaluation of innovation activities and ensure access to data that is fit for evaluation. The presenters reflected that ongoing learning evaluation is more complex than initially anticipated, highlighting the need for a shared view of expectations and the difficulty of balancing between the evaluator's independence and involvement. Ongoing learning evaluations should be used when introducing new and complex measures or when there is limited knowledge on the topic available in the organisation.

Link to the presentation: [EIP-AGRI evaluation in Sweden](#)

After the presentation, participants posed the following questions to the presenter:

 <p>The achievement of innovation oriented projects or policies is very difficult to evaluate, do you find that this is really true?</p> <p>Innovation policy is a rare field where there is a rich history of evaluation findings in the last 20 years. It is one of the best thematic fields in terms of having methods to evaluate. There was also the Lisbon strategy in the 2000s, which was the first European strategy to give a push to innovation policy. Although there is a bottleneck, which is the transfer of all this knowledge about general European issues, to the agriculture sector.</p>	<p><i>Mr Karlsson agreed with the statement, as one can always learn from other areas.</i></p> <p><i>Mr Markus noted that in this project, when it was set up, the MA had a rather naïve view of what impacts could be identified. The expectation was that evaluators would be able to pin-point wider impacts already after a few years of programme and EIP-AGRI implementation and that counterfactual analysis and identifying clear causal links between innovation projects and some change on indicators or factors would be possible. Meanwhile this potentially cannot be seen until several years down the line.</i></p>
<p>On the advisory committee that you mentioned, is it some established group with different researchers, or MA and advisors? Do they have a checklist to look at project applications?</p>	<p><i>Mr Markus informed that their advisory committee consists of a group of external experts including researchers that has been procured through tendering. They formed a permanent group, which met regularly during programme implementation to rate incoming applications. Then the MA would formally decide on applications but they gave their expert review or rating of applications. For those interested, they could put them in contact with the responsible person in the MA, who knows the selection criteria for the group.</i></p>
<p>Do you want to share your learning experience or process with the PA and their willingness to adapt their systems for</p>	<p><i>Mr Markus clarified that, in Sweden, the MA and PA are formally part of the same organisation, being separated in different sections. The project manager for evaluations is the MA. If the data is available in</i></p>

evaluation? Additionally, you mentioned changes to your IT system as well, is this the one managed by your PA and you now have better linkages?

the PA system and there is no data restriction on sharing it, it is very easy for the MA to get hold of it and pass it on to evaluators. Regarding this willingness to adapt and change, the evaluators encountered some reluctance from desk officers initially. They were more used to audits instead of evaluations, which might have led to some confusion. However, managers and evaluators explained the reason for this process and by the end it was a smoother process.

Have you evaluated the quality of plans or projects? Sometimes, it is difficult to evaluate projects if they do not include a clear general objective, or specific objective. Can evaluators suggest how to improve the planning documents?

Mr Markus informed that their evaluators looked more in general on how the quality of EIP projects is assessed, i.e. the external advisors and their work with assessing the applications. But the evaluators did not review the projects themselves. They did however provide some reflections, e.g. that the Swedish EIP has quite a strict definition of innovation, which may limit the number of potential projects that receive funding.

2.2.2 Experience from the EU-level

Ms Monika Beck, Head of Agriculture & Environment department at ADE, presented an evaluation of the CAP's impact on knowledge exchange and advisory services, implemented by ADE, CCRI and CREA in 2019-2020. The focus was on the CAP instruments and measures between 2014-2020 and whether they had an effect on knowledge exchange, advisory activities and innovation, in the agriculture and forestry sectors. The study included two evaluation questions linked to AKIS, one on the architecture of CAP implementation in the MS and how the linkage of knowledge exchange, innovation and advisory activities are essential for an efficient and functioning AKIS. The second, focused on the drivers and reasons of implementation of choices, especially the uptake of knowledge sharing and innovation measures as support measures in the RDPs first and by farmers if these measures were included in the RDP. The study noted that only a very small share of overall CAP support is dedicated to measures on knowledge sharing and innovation and while MS AKIS are diverse, they are not explicit. The study also further highlighted the importance of strengthening of information flows between farmers and researchers, farmers and advisors and researchers and advisors.

Link to the presentation: [Evaluation of the CAP's impact on knowledge exchange and advisory services](#)

After the presentation, participants posed the following questions to the presenter:



You mentioned that there is a close relation between knowledge exchange and CAP support. What were the criteria you used?

Ms Beck noted that close cooperation is important for the functioning of AKIS but it does not necessarily exist. They tried to see if the different knowledge measures were actually linked to CAP support. If you support organic farming who is providing knowledge advise to farmers? They concluded that it was largely provided by the MS outside of the CAP, given that advice concerns small support compared to the administrative burden to fund it through the CAP.

2.2.3 Experience from the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)

Dr. Aurélie Toillier, a scientist in innovation management at the Research and Extension Unit of the FAO's Office of Innovation, presented their action-orientated methodology to assess agricultural innovation systems in LMICs (low and medium income countries), and how this methodology could be taken into consideration for AKIS evaluation in Europe. It was developed by the FAO to assist their member countries to undertake a comprehensive analysis of Agricultural Innovation Systems (AIS). It can help countries develop and design policy analysis systems and could be used by agricultural authorities with minimal support. The theoretical and operational framework includes four steps (details can be seen in the presentation). The development of this methodology comprised three different phases, beginning with a research-led framework design through a consultation process using the DELPHI technique and expert dialogue with an initial online survey. This was followed by FAO-led tests in nine pilot countries, that is currently underway. In the future, FAO hopes to enrich the framework with country tools and practical guides. While piloting the methodology, there were also some difficulties identified in the nine pilot countries, such as the risk of being too descriptive and failure-oriented (gaps, weaknesses, etc.), lack of an AIS transformation perspective, uneven efforts in the different steps of the assessment and the value of the method packages to develop capacities not yet demonstrated.

Link to presentation 1: [An action-orientated methodology to assess agricultural innovation systems in LMICs \(low and medium income countries\)](#)

Ms Nevena Alexandrova, from the Research and Extension Unit of the FAO's Office of Innovation, presented their indicator framework for the assessment of AIS. This framework is divided into core indicators, optional indicators and contextual analysis, all of which can be found in their [publication](#). The FAO's objective was to transform the AIS in a way that they can promote and scale up innovations faster, and also resolve problems that are not only focused on production but also lead to food system transformation. The findings and experience showed that existing solutions are unlikely to be effective if different problem dimensions e.g. only research or advisory services are analysed and treated separately. For this reason the multicriteria design of the framework is preferable. Ms Alexandrova concluded that the indicator frameworks are useful to lead governments and agri-food stakeholders towards more progress on innovation, increasing the transparency, evidence-based policy formulation and target investments. Additionally, the link between enabling factors for innovation, AIS actor interactions, innovation provision intensity and knowledge, adoption and development outcomes is not a linear pathway from inputs to impact, but involves feedbacks, spill-overs, unintended consequences and other non-linear relations.

Link to presentation 2: [FAO indicator framework for assessment of Agricultural Innovation Systems](#)

After the presentation, participants posed the following questions to the presenter:

The big difference is that we work in a harmonized framework in Europe, whereas Ms Alexandrova has to adapt to the conditions (e.g., it is not recognized that innovation is a process). In the slides on the indicators, is the number of investments in research relevant to show how much

Ms Alexandrova replied that they had to base their framework on existing indicators where possible and on what is easier to measure from a developing country perspective. There are no good existing and globally available indicators that capture the whole complexity of the AIS, such as actors' relationships, research products adoption etc. , hence the FAO proposed to complete the existing indicators with building new but critical ones, as well as optional indicators to complement the AIS picture. Furthermore, the framework combines two groups of indicators: (i) on AIS input side (25 indicators), such as investment in research, and (ii) AIS outcome and impact side (11 indicators), such as knowledge, adoption and development outcomes. In the case of investment in research (input side), there



research has been produced but never came to practice?

are several matching indicators that allow to conclude on the adoption of the research and its efficiency and effectiveness. In any case, indicator frameworks are not exact measurement of the AIS system single parameters but approximations that ,when used together, form a holistic picture of the country AIS and can indicate where the strengths and weaknesses are, and then identify targeted policy and investment actions.

Ms Toillier complemented by noting that the indicators were identified through a participatory process and it is important to acknowledge the accessibility of data that can be used to do such an assessment, along with its validity. In Burkina Faso they reviewed the existing database in the country, related to agricultural innovation. Then they assessed the validity and accessibility of this database. This was followed by a consensual choice of indicators. It was an important but long process. It was a way to force technical units in the Ministry to sit down together and understand all the databases that are available but not used.

The presentation is very interesting. This type of intervention-research might boost up the AKIS network in a country. Is there evidence regarding this development in the countries where this approach is or was implemented?

Ms Toillier informed that they will have this information in 2024, as currently they are still assisting some policy-making and dialogues based on the findings of the assessments. After that they will be able to see what was implemented and what was not.

This is a great approach to combine internal and external evaluation. How do you safeguard the independent role of the evaluator?

Ms Toillier noted that this is a fully-fledged utilization-focused evaluation indeed. One of the priorities is making sure that the results of the assessment will be used to feed decision making and policy but they are aware this is not always reliable as it is difficult for someone to assess something that is not well understood.

3 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The outcomes of the presentations and discussions on how to assess AKIS, together with the group discussions, provided insights in relation to what should be evaluated in relation to AKIS, when and how as well as the challenges entailed in AKIS evaluations. A summary of the outcomes of the group discussions are included in the **Annex**. The discussions of Day 1 focused on the scope for evaluating AKIS, the choice of evaluation criteria and the evaluation challenges. The discussions on Day 2 went a step further to make suggestions on what should be evaluated and how, by touching upon issues related to methods and data sources.

The scope of evaluating AKIS. A threefold approach can be distinguished for the assessment of AKIS: a) the assessment of single interventions (which has been the approach followed in the 2014-2020 period where AKIS was not part of RDPs, while currently CAP Strategic Plans include a dedicated section to AKIS, as well as AKIS-specific interventions); b) the assessment of the combination of interventions within the AKIS strategic approach and their contribution to the cross-cutting objective of modernisation, as well as to the other Specific Objectives of the CAP; and c) the assessment of the AKISs systems on the ground (the system, its components, the different levels) by analysing the state of play and pathways of change of AKISs, i.e. how the AKIS components are changing because of the CAP. Evaluating AKIS is a complex exercise and there is no one size fits all approach.

Specific topics to focus on may include the strategic approach (e.g. how the interventions work together), the actors and their interactions/cooperation, the effects (e.g. changes in the farmers' behaviour, the achievement of social innovation, changes in regional or micro AKISs), the communication/dissemination strategies and their effects, the delivery mechanisms of AKIS to stakeholders.

A key concluding remark is that the objectives of the evaluations should clearly define what approach is followed, taking into account that AKIS is a tool of cross-cutting nature for the CAP as it contributes to the cross-cutting modernisation objective

The timing of the AKIS evaluation. The theory of change approach may be most relevant as an iterative process since the early stages of implementation. This can contribute to ongoing learning to support decision making and ownership. The scope of evaluations may differ depending on the implementation stages, for instance, at the beginning of implementation, the focus would be on baselines, understanding the system, assessing the relevance and consistency of interventions or mapping the AKIS actors. During implementation, the focus may be on the functioning of operational groups, the actors involvement or the models applied.

A key concluding remark is that the theory of change applied since the beginning and throughout implementation may build comprehensive knowledge about AKIS

The challenges of evaluating AKIS. Conceptual, methodological and data collection challenges have been identified. Conceptual include little awareness or common understanding about the AKIS and its cross-cutting nature. Methodological challenges include how to reduce complexity entailed in the multiplicity and dynamicity of AKISs and their functioning (actors and interactions), how to measure certain elements like knowledge transfer or the functioning of EIPs, how to assess the development of AKIS actors and the changes in their role and positioning within the system or how to measure the

scalability of innovations. There are also challenges related to the indicators, such as the need for more specific indicators (potentially co-constructed by AKIS actors), since numbers do not express the quality of interactions. Data collection challenges include the availability of data for ongoing evaluations.

An overarching challenge is the limited evaluative capacities and methods for AKIS evaluations

The evaluation criteria. Relevance (e.g., the combination of interventions to address the objectives of AKIS) and coherence (especially external but also internal, e.g., are the AKISs well combined, leading to synergies in the CAP Strategic Plan) are considered important to be assessed since the early stages of implementation, using the ex ante as a reference. Effectiveness can be assessed in relation to the uptake and how it was used, while efficiency is very difficult to define for such types of interventions, therefore process efficiency may be more pertinent.

A key concluding remark is that the evaluation criteria can be selected according to the timing/state of implementation of the AKIS interventions

The evaluation questions, methods and data sources. There is a wide range of issues that Member States may want to know about AKIS, which implies that there are many different evaluation questions that may be asked. Such issues include knowledge flows and information (e.g. how does knowledge flow? what communication channels are used for information exchange?), actors and their links (e.g. to what extent are the various actors present in the AKIS interventions? how are networks evolving?), innovation (e.g. are innovative ideas constantly taken up? is innovation for grassroots support available?). In terms of methods, qualitative ones are considered most pertinent for the assessment of AKIS (e.g., social network analysis), however, capacities need to increase even for the use of participatory methods, while introducing also self-assessment methods, peer-to-peer assessment or tools like points awarded to innovation projects. Data sources include the PA database as well as information directly from the projects or a specific AKIS database (depends on the Member State).

Final concluding remarks are that the evaluation should be an integrated one (no assessment of single measures) and that the social network analysis is the most pertinent method to assess functioning/flows/new instruments (can assess dynamics)

ANNEX 1 – Outcome of group discussions on Day 1

Day 1 Group Discussions

Summary of Day 1 discussions with the objective of reaching a common understanding on the scope of evaluating AKIS

What to evaluate and when?

Objectives:

- Objectives must be specific and related to local circumstances
- Define if measures should be analysed separately or combined
- Look at interventions together and their effect on the crosscutting objective
- Bear in mind that AKIS is not an intervention, but a tool/concept with a cross-cutting objective
- The goal is to modernise, to transform the food system. And knowledge and innovation among all actors helps to get stronger and to be prepared

The AKIS system and its interfaces:

- Functions, structures, and capacities of AKIS
- Role of actors/organizations (researchers, advisors, networks) in AKIS (e.g. role as innovation brokers) and their links;
- The interfaces of the AKIS system to the existing national/regional innovation system
- How many farmers are involved in different ways in AKIS interventions
- Have actors changed their participation/activities
- Cooperation, networking, knowledge sharing between farmers, researchers, advisors and networks
- Whether AKIS parts are known amongst farmers, whether there is awareness in terms of AKIS
- The delivery mechanism of how AKIS will be delivered to stakeholders

The interventions and their operation:

- How are the planned interventions working together?

The effects:

- How has the behaviour of the farmers changed and how?
- What is the contribution of AKIS to CAP objectives?
- AKIS at regional levels; micro AKIS
- Social innovation should be considered/included more, as we are also talking about 'micro AKISs

When:

- Depends on what interventions each MS implements
- At the beginning:
 - Who are the stakeholders?
 - Structures and administrative procedures, communication, are innovation brokers giving the right support?
 - How is the capacity of actors/organizations of AKIS etc. (--> formative evaluation)

- During implementation / intermediate evaluation:
 - Data collection from farmers;
 - A survey among beneficiaries to ask if they know, if they participate, related to AKIS funds
 - Do the Operational Groups work well together?
 - Is trust created and everyone involved?
 - How are women involved? etc. (formative evaluation)
- Ex post:
 - Has innovation entered in the mainstream advisory services ?
 - Is it state of the art? etc. (summative evaluation)

Challenges

Conceptual

- Concept of modernisation: what exactly is meant
- Beware of misunderstandings: digitalisation is a tool, not AKIS Dangerous to replace everything that can relate to AKIS (knowledge, innovation) to digitalisation (some MS have done so in their CSP)
- There is not a joint understanding of AIS/AKIS
- AKIS is concept/tool to analyse how various actors are connected, but not easy for a federal state as Germany (regional AKISs)
- Defining the AKIS system is difficult as national systems not funded by CAP SP interplay
- Understanding of the cross-cutting nature of AKIS: Assessing AKIS is assessing the CAP
- Helping different actors understand their role in AKIS

Methodological

- Reduce complexity by breaking down AKIS into layers and determine what layer can be assessed when
- Difficult to measure the knowledge transfer
- Difficult for farmers to separate measures from one another
- How to assess the functioning of the EIPs? Need to go beyond interventions
- Difficult to have overall view of AKIS as there are measures also outside the CAP SP
- How to really measure scalability? The process is complex
- How to see how different interventions have added value to businesses? e.g. impact on decision making
- Complexity of stakeholders involved in CAP interventions
- Operational Groups: lack of dissemination... include in obligations to pay more attention to dissemination/events where more farmers can profit
- How to make evaluation useful not only for researchers but also for the farmer (communicate added value)?
- The more you look at from the intervention point of view, it would be less of a challenge (bottom up approach)
- The difficulty is that it can become only an "academic exercise" because it is too complex

Data collection

- Availability of data is a challenge for ongoing evaluations

- Knowledge sharing and advice can still be done without digitalisation: how to get data on this
- In addition, if the evaluation intends to go beyond PMEF result indicators, defining additional ones may be a challenge as data may not be readily available

Lack of experience

- In current period we did not do anything specific in relation to M1, M2
- Did not reflect on contents of innovative projects
- How to encourage partners of AKIS to evaluate themselves and the system
- Do all farmers have the capacity to participate?
- Competences of evaluators: are they enough to evaluate AKIS?

Evaluation criteria

Important to share good practises on how to select projects for receiving funding

Relevance:

- Assess ex ante and throughout implementation
- Taking into account the different situation in each MS
- Could be useful to evaluate early
- How well the interventions are combined to address objectives of AKIS?

Effectiveness:

- How many involved, how many used, learned, participated
- How many of them found useful what they have learned
- Effectiveness and Efficiency are workable if we break down AKIS in manageable packages
- Is it important to assess the communication of the AKIS results?

Efficiency:

- Difficult to assess relation between costs and outcomes (as the latter not straightforward to define)
- Efficiency not so relevant for this type of interventions

Impact:

- How many of them used new idea/info they have learned

Coherence:

- Especially external coherence
- How to select the best project (delivery mechanism is very important here)

Day 2 Group Discussions

Summary of Day 2 discussions with the objective of collecting ideas on what and how to assess AKIS

Evaluation questions: What do you want to know?

Knowledge/information flows

- Transfer of knowledge
- How does knowledge flow?
- Success of uptake of knowledge (knowledge hubs)
- What communication channels for information exchange? (formal and informal)

Actors/links

- Strength of connections between actors
- To what extent are the various actors present in the AKIS interventions (incl. national)
- How do the local, regional, national institutions participate in AKIS?
- How is the network evolving/ increasing?

Relevance

- Fit for purpose (relevance and quality of implementation)
- How do the farmers evaluate the AKIS interventions, needs, opportunities? (is it relevant for them?)

Internal coherence

- AKIS might be still fragmented in practice: are they well combined, leading to synergies in the CAP SP?
- How do the advisory services work?
- To what extent is a bottom up approach in the interventions implemented? (incl. national interventions)

Innovation

- How do the farmers work in innovation? What kind of support do they need?
- Are innovative ideas constantly taken up?
- Is innovation support for capturing or for developing grass-root support available and paid?
- What are the linkages between past research activities in innovation and impact?

Methods: How to introduce more robust methods?

- Interviews/FGs/Surveys
- Point of innovation projects
- Network analysis
- Peer to peer analysis
- Flexible evaluations

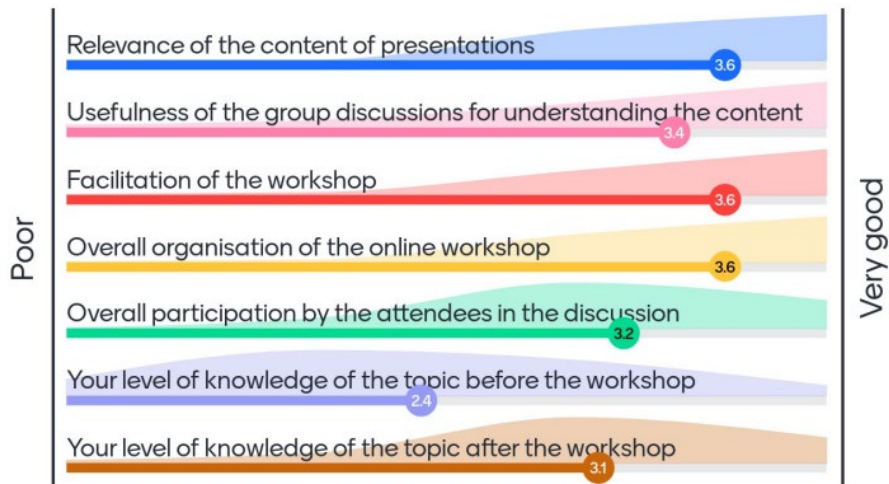
Data sources: Where would the data come from?

- PA data system
- Database of innovation projects
- Depends on each country
- Focus on capacities is also important

ANNEX 2 – Results of the Mentimeter feedback poll

Please find below the outcome of the Mentimeter feedback poll that was executed during the Good Practice Workshop. The poll was launched in order to determine the satisfaction of the participants with the execution of the Good Practise Workshop, as well as get feedback on how to the Good Practise Workshops can be improved in the future.

Feedback on the Good Practice Workshop



Strenght, Weaknesses, Suggestions, Comments...?



Thanks a lot for a very interesting content of the meeting.	Thanks a lot for a very interesting content of the meeting.	Congratulations!
very good workshop..	very good content and discussion	Have a quality criterions for the presenters (Finnish case)
Please don't skip any breaks. It was too much information to take at once		

European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP

Rue Belliard 12

1040 Brussels

Belgium

Tel: +32 2 808 10 24

email: info@ruralevaluation.eu

https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/evaluation_en

