



Evaluation Support Study on the Information Policy on the Common Agricultural Policy

Leaflet

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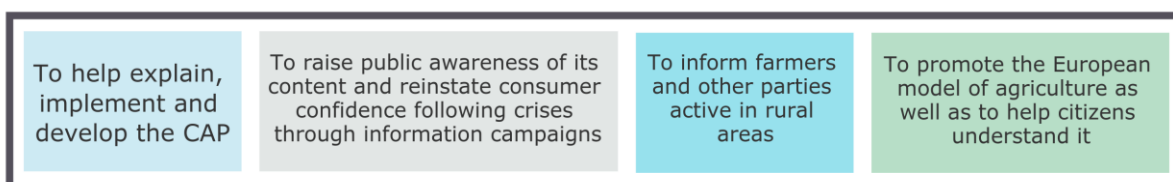
The United Kingdom withdrew from the European Union as of 1 February 2020. During the transition period, which ends on 31 December 2020, Union law, with a few limited exceptions, continues to be applicable to and in the United Kingdom and any reference to Member States in Union law shall be understood as including the United Kingdom.

OBJECTIVE OF THE EVALUATION - INFORMATION POLICY ON THE COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is understood as “a partnership between agriculture and society, and between Europe and its farmers”. The CAP covers all of the EU Member States. Among other aims, it seeks to “support farmers and improve agricultural productivity, ensuring a stable supply of affordable food” and to “maintain rural areas and landscapes across the EU”¹. The CAP is the oldest common policy of the European Union, dating back to the 1960s. It has shaped the EU in many ways, especially due to its significant financial size (at one point the CAP accounted for 85% of the total EU budget; as of 2020, it comprises around 35%). The design and structure of the CAP have been at the centre of political debates at European level for decades. Over time, the CAP has been reformed to strengthen the competitiveness of the sector, to promote sustainable farming and innovation to support jobs and growth in rural areas, and to help address the environmental and climate challenges the EU faces.

Due to the importance of the CAP to the European Union, it is necessary to properly communicate about the policy both to its wide groups of stakeholders, and to EU citizens. Based on Regulation (EU) No 1306/2013, the Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development (DG AGRI) within the European Commission implements the information policy on the CAP to communicate with European citizens and stakeholders about the CAP. In the figure below, we present the objectives of the information policy.

Figure 1. Objectives of the information policy on the CAP

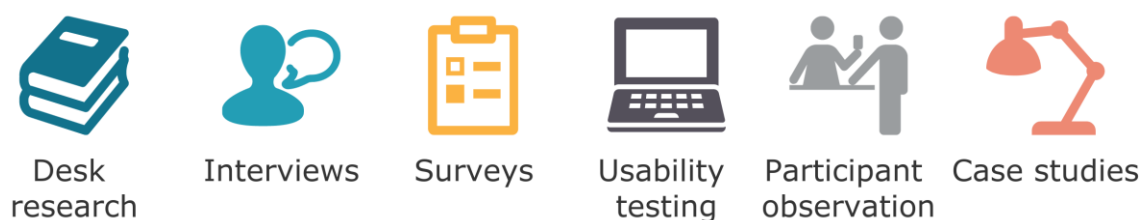


This evaluation study aimed to examine the information policy on the CAP and to evaluate its **relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency** and **EU added value**. As part of this study, two types of communication activities are explored:

- those **implemented at the initiative of the Commission** (media networking including the Ag-Press network for journalists, which includes various activities such as press trips, seminars and the Ag-Press.eu platform; social media activities; the website at Europa.eu; and various events targeting stakeholders and citizens),
- those **implemented by third parties and co-financed through grants**.

The evidence for this evaluation was gathered through various research methods and the triangulation of data. The key methods used are presented in the next figure.

Figure 2. Main research methods used in this evaluation

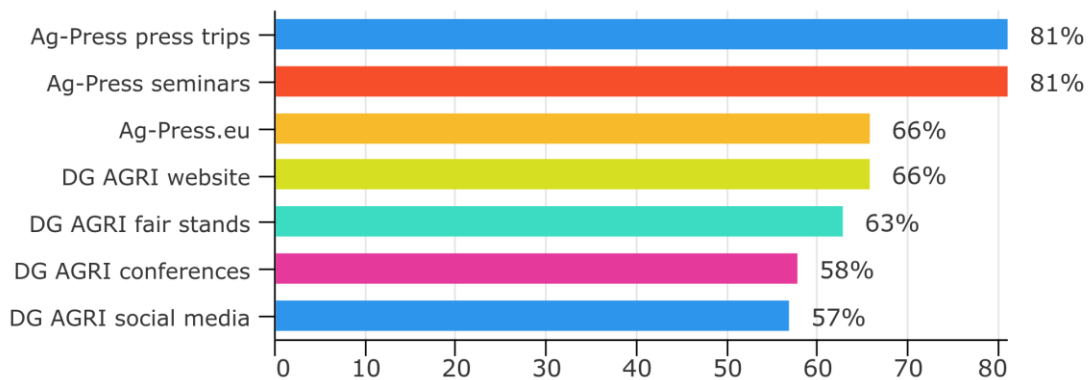


¹ The European Commission, 'The common agricultural policy at a glance'. URL: https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/key-policies/common-agricultural-policy/cap-glance_en

Based on the findings of this research, we have developed a series of recommendations as to how the information policy on the CAP could be implemented in the future. The results and recommendations of the evaluation will feed into the design of DG AGRI' new external communication strategy for the CAP after 2020.

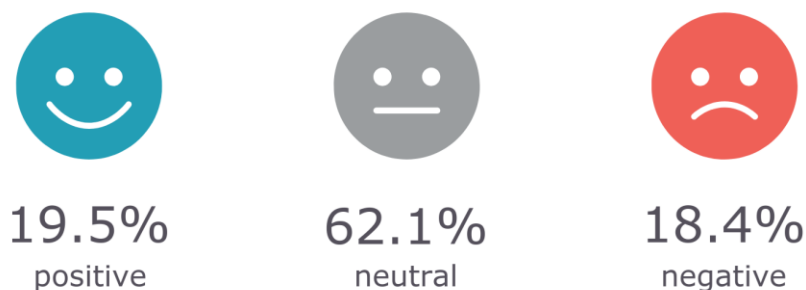
The study found that the information policy on the CAP was **successful in improving** the way in which stakeholders and citizens **understand and perceive the CAP**. Most respondents experienced **positive results and impacts from the information on the CAP** they received, with the Ag-Press journalist network and the website having the most positive effects among the activities analysed (see the next figure).

Figure 3. Percentage of respondents who agreed that they view the CAP more positively due to information from...



The CAP is a policy that has been perceived both positively and negatively by different groups of stakeholders and citizens. While a significant amount of information exists that is critical of the CAP, this does not dominate discussions surrounding the policy. Most of the stakeholders surveyed did not remember seeing information about the CAP that conflicted with the information communicated by DG AGRI. Similarly, media monitoring conducted in the EU Member States by our national experts revealed that most articles mentioning the CAP do so either positively or neutrally (see the next figure).

Figure 4. Sentiment of media articles mentioning the CAP in the EU Member States

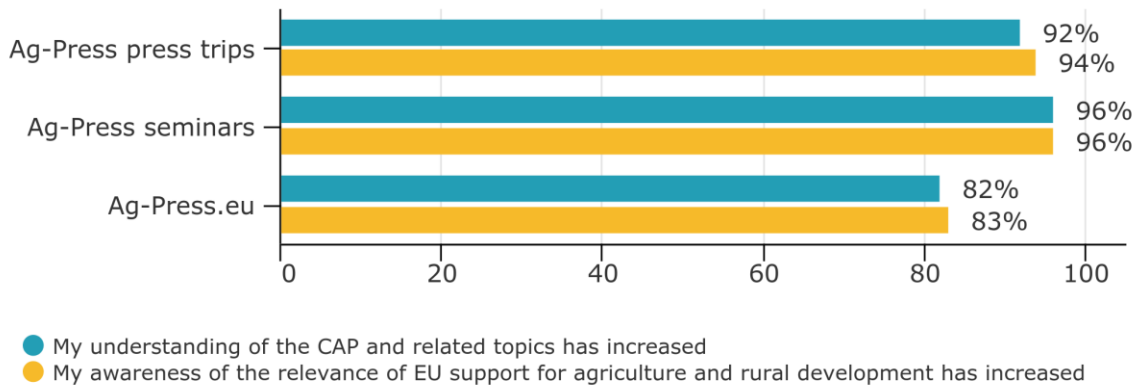


Overall, the information policy on the CAP provides a **good mix of communication activities** that are relevant, coherent, effective and efficient. Below, we present the main findings in relation to each specific activity.

Media networking (Ag-Press network)

The Ag-Press network functioned mostly effectively and contributed to improved understanding and more positive perceptions of the CAP among journalists who acted as multipliers. All the activities of the Ag-Press network – namely, the events, the platform and the newsletter – met the needs of the journalists and were highly relevant to them.

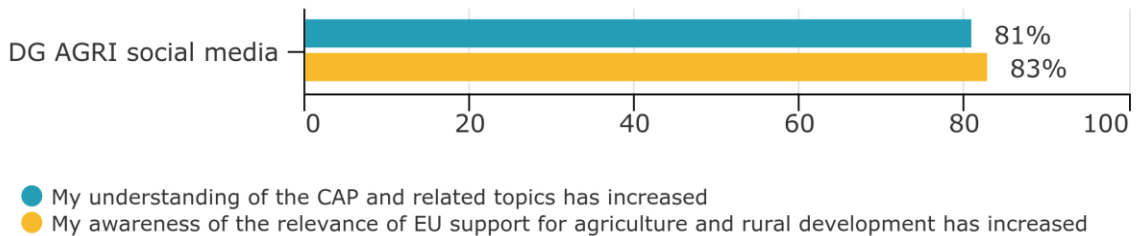
Figure 5. Percentage of respondents who agreed that the Ag-Press network had increased their understanding and awareness of the CAP and related topics



Social media

DG AGRI’s social media channels experienced a growth in followers, reach and engagement, contributing to increased understanding among users, and a more positive perception of the CAP. The findings suggest that social media is effective among its current users, yet still has potential for better reach, particularly among representatives of stakeholder organisations. DG AGRI’s social media were mostly relevant and useful for followers.

Figure 6. Percentage of respondents who agreed DG AGRI social media had increased their understanding and awareness of the CAP and related topics



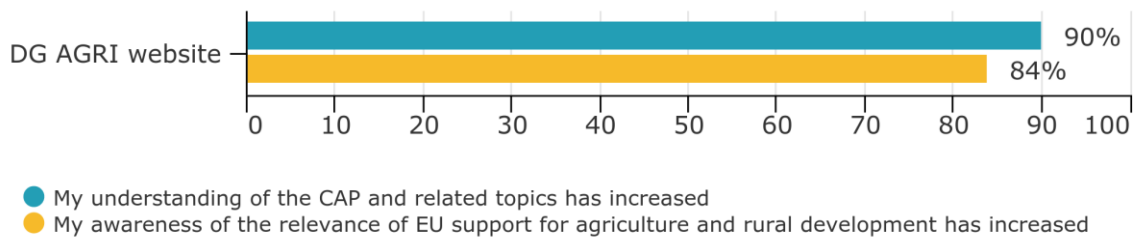
Website

While it is still too early to draw definitive conclusions about the digital transformation², it is certainly a promising start in terms of creating a more citizen-friendly website. Visits to and downloads from the new website are increasing, and most users perceive the content very positively: they trust it, they find it useful, and they agree that there is a lot of it. However, many users reported problems with the website’s usability, as revealed during usability testing and interviews. The usability problems related mostly to navigation, language and search.

A high rate of returning users indicates that the website meets their needs. In addition, most users agree that the website is relevant and that the information provided there is interesting.

² DG AGRI began transferring content from the old website to a new class, ‘Food, Farming, Fisheries’, on the Commission’s website in 2018, and finished in late 2019. The purpose of this digital transformation was to make the website more citizen-friendly and focused on serving the user.

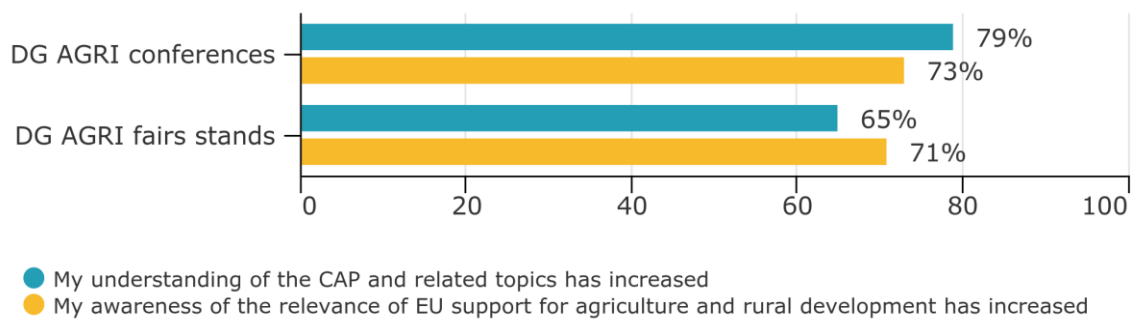
Figure 7. Percentage of respondents who agreed that the DG AGRI website had increased their understanding and awareness of the CAP and related topics



Events

Events (including conferences and fair stands) are well organised. Participation in conferences and agri-food fairs helps to improve understanding of the CAP and related topics and increase awareness of the relevance of EU support for agriculture and rural development. Both conferences and fairs meet the needs of various audiences, with stakeholders agreeing that the events were useful and interesting, and that they gained new contacts as well as new and important information there.

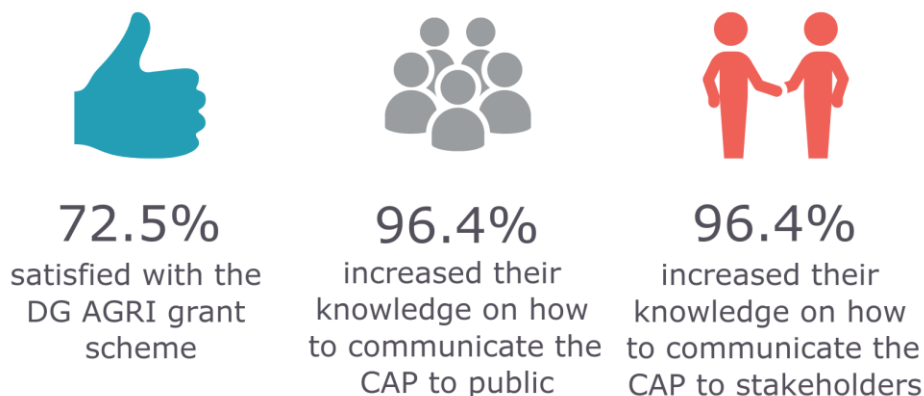
Figure 8. Percentage of respondents who agreed that DG AGRI events had increased their understanding and awareness of the CAP and related topics



Grants

The grant scheme can be considered effective in relation to various project-related aspects: management, implementation, and achievements. Overall, most of the grant applicants surveyed were satisfied with the grant scheme (see the next figure), and said that it met their expectations.

Figure 9. Percentage of grant applicants surveyed who...



Importantly, the grant scheme was effective in improving the organisational capacities of its beneficiaries in terms of communication. The co-financing provided by DG AGRI also meant that they could increase the scope of their projects, or even begin new projects.

The grant projects were effective in communicating messages about the CAP. The messages communicated by grant projects were also relevant to their local target audiences in the Member States.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE POLICY

For the overall information policy on the CAP, we recommend:

Focusing on reaching citizens at national, regional and local levels. In the context of the Sibiu meeting and the CAP reform, this increased focus could involve national actors, including national public authorities.

Further strengthening the focus on communication through multipliers: intermediary organisations such as national, regional and local agricultural associations; small and medium-sized businesses based in rural areas; or national, regional and local news media.

Keeping under review the possibilities to support multipliers in better understanding the CAP, in order to improve their capacity to communicate the policy clearly and effectively.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we recommend testing various new technologies and formats to better reach target audiences online. If they prove successful, these innovative formats could be continued after the pandemic. Examples include:

- Maximising the use of video
- Interactivity (quizzes, calculators, interactive videos, games etc.)

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we recommend testing various new content-related approaches. If proved successful, these innovative trends could be continued after the pandemic. Examples include:

- Maximising the use of personalised content (according to the context of user)
- Simplification of content (personal stories, simple language)
- User-generated content
- Influencer marketing

As pandemic-related restrictions are relaxed in the future, we recommend increasing the amount and variety of physical activities in the Member States. Activities could be increased by:

- Capitalising on participation at fairs in various Member States
- Strengthening the focus on communication activities in those Member States that hold the Presidency of the Council of the EU

Reacting to discussions on both positive and potentially negative aspects of the CAP by providing factual and objective evidence.

Preparing a communication strategy that would better integrate different EU policies/strategies and would focus still further on working together with other DGs to communicate these policies.

Preparing a communication strategy that would take into account the increased role of the Member States in communicating the CAP and focus on creating synergies with the governments of the Member States.

ACTIVITY-SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

For media networking, we recommend:

Facilitating the offering to Ag-Press members of "exclusive content" to increase the effectiveness of the platform and encourage journalists to write about CAP-related topics.

Offering more in-depth seminars on CAP-related topics and ensuring the presence of high-level speakers.

While COVID-19 restrictions remain in place, DG AGRI could focus on online seminars for Ag-Press members.

Once the pandemic-related restrictions have been relaxed, we recommend organising no more than two press trips a year, preferably to the countries holding the Council Presidency. In addition, we recommend holding 2-3 seminars.

For social media, we recommend:

Keeping under review the existing internal procedures used by DG AGRI social media team to react swiftly to the dissemination of misinformation about the CAP.

Aligning the names of the different DG AGRI social media accounts.

Providing links from the DG AGRI website to its social media accounts and between different DG AGRI social media accounts (e.g. a link from the Facebook page 'EU Food & Farming' to the Twitter account 'EU Agriculture').

For the website, we recommend:

Continuous user research to improve the information architecture.

Prioritising the translation of all the pages in the class 'Food, Farming, Fisheries' into all official EU languages.

Pushing for the Commission-wide improvement of the internal search engine.

Strengthening the website in terms of external search engine optimisation.

For events, we recommend:

Choosing and consistently following the same methodology for estimating and reporting the number of visitors to DG AGRI stands at fairs.

Keeping under review the preparatory activities provided for DG AGRI officials before they go to agri-food fairs.

For the grant scheme, we recommend:

Defining the KPIs that grant recipients should follow when implementing activities.

Emphasising the need for consistent impact indicators to be submitted in the final report.

Putting more efforts into promoting the grant scheme, particularly in countries where none or few grants were implemented.

Promoting more cross-national projects by simplifying the application requirements so that affiliated entities from countries other than that of the beneficiary can join the project, while ensuring that messaging remains consistent with the objectives of the information policy and the profiles of local audiences.

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