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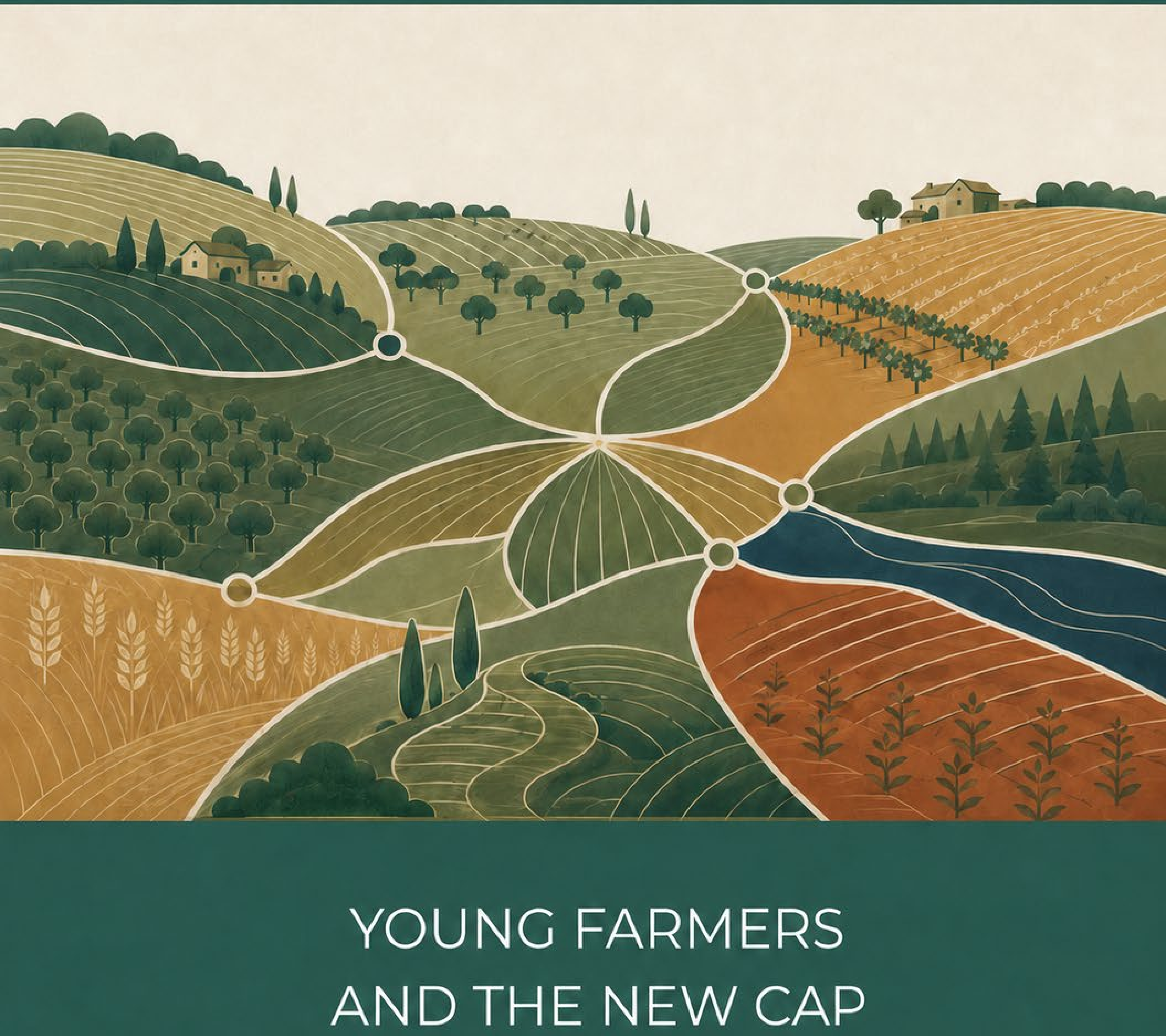

YOUNG FARMERS AND THE NEW CAP

Lessons from Italy's Young Farmers Package

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"*If you reach a young farmer, you will see the benefits for 40 years, […]*"

European Commission, 2019, p. 29

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List of abbreviations

Abbreviation	Full term
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
RDP	Rural Development Programme
YFP	Young Farmers Package

Introduction

One of the most significant challenges facing the future of European agriculture is the need to attract a new generation of farmers to the sector. The gradual decline in the number of young farmers, the barriers to land access and credit, and the growing complexity of farm management make it clear that setting-up support alone is insufficient. Starting and consolidating a farm business requires a range of measures that can assist young farmers at different stages of business development, including financial resources, investment, training, advisory services and other forms of assistance.

The same approach underpins the proposal to introduce a “starter pack” for young farmers in the post-2027 Common Agricultural Policy. Rather than a stand-alone measure, it would be a coordinated package of support built around the farm project and the needs of the beneficiary. Although this is a new element in the European debate, there is an important precedent in the Italian Young Farmers Package, which brought together the setting-up premium, investment support and, in some cases, other rural development measures within a single pathway.

This document provides an accessible overview of the new instrument, drawing on the lessons learned from the Italian experience. Rather than offering a comprehensive evaluation of the Young Farmers Package, it explains how the package was implemented in different regional contexts, and which elements could be useful for future European programming.

First, the document outlines the main challenges associated with generational renewal and the policy tools introduced to address these challenges. It then turns to the Italian experience, demonstrating how the Young Farmers Package was interpreted and applied differently across the regions. Comparing these implementation models helps identify strengths and weaknesses of each approach and provides a basis for considering the possible transition from the Young Farmers Package to the starter pack.

The last section summarises the key lessons learned and suggests practical ways to improve the accessibility, integration and alignment of future support with the actual needs of young farmers.

The Italian experience shows that combining multiple measures represents a step forward, but this does not automatically result in more effective support. The core challenge lies in creating a coherent pathway that facilitates young people’s entry into farming while supporting them in establishing viable, innovative, and sustainable enterprises.

1. YOUNG FARMERS AT THE CENTRE OF THE EUROPEAN AGENDA

9.3%	**Share of farm managers under 40 in Italy in 2020** Their number decreased by 43% compared with 2010.

European agriculture needs new energy if it is to ensure producing food, innovating and sustaining rural areas.

In 2020, the average age of farmers in the European Union (EU) was 57, with only 12% under the age of 40. In Italy, only 9.3% of farm managers were under 40 in the same year, a sharp 43% decline compared to 2010. The ageing of the agricultural workforce, together with difficulties in accessing land and credit and high start-up costs, makes generational renewal a crucial issue for the future of agriculture and rural areas (European Commission, 2025a; Henke and Sardone, 2022; Licciardo et al., 2023).

The generational imbalance is more than a demographic issue. Farms managed by people under 40 have a different entrepreneurial profile from the rest of the sector. Their farms have a larger average utilised agricultural area – 18.3 hectares compared with around 10 hectares for farms managed by farmers over 40 – and show higher levels of education, innovation, digitalisation and diversification (Licciardo et al., 2023).

The issue, therefore, is not only the limited presence of young people in agriculture, but also the widening generational divide. On many farms, the ageing of current managers is not being offset by the influx of new entrepreneurs. This makes it more difficult to ensure the continuity of production and to adapt the sector to economic, technological and environmental change.

Policies supporting young farmers therefore have a central role to play. The aim is to help young farmers enter the sector and support businesses during their formative years, enabling them to become established, innovate and contribute to the vitality of rural areas.

This is the rationale behind the proposal to introduce more integrated forms of support for setting up and growing new farm businesses in the post-2027 Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

2. THE STARTER PACK FOR GENERATIONAL RENEWAL

NOT JUST A PREMIUM	**Is a setting-up premium alone enough to help young people enter farming?** Starting a farming business requires resources, investment, skills, access to land and guidance.

The European Commission's vision for the next programming period is built around a straightforward principle: receiving an initial premium is not enough to start an agricultural business. Young farmers also need capital, skills, investment, advice and services during the first years in business, which are often the most challenging.

This marks an important shift in perspective. Young farmers are no longer viewed simply as passive recipients of financial support, but as entrepreneurs who need guidance in developing a viable farming project. The aim is to facilitate entry into farming while enhancing a business's capacity to consolidate, innovate, diversify its activities and embed itself in the local economy and community.

In the Strategy for Generational Renewal in Agriculture, the starter pack forms part of a broader policy framework which also covers access to land and credit, skills development, services in rural areas, and farm transfers (European Commission, 2025a). The European Commission (EC) recommends that Member States allocate at least 6% of future national agricultural resources to generational renewal and prepare national strategies based on needs assessments and measurable objectives. For regional Managing Authorities, coordinating agricultural instruments, territorial policies and support services will be crucial.

Therefore, the point is not to replace the setting-up premium, but to incorporate it into a broader framework that supports both the initial establishment and the subsequent consolidation of the business.

From this perspective, the Italian experience with the Young Farmers Package (YFP) provides a useful reference point for understanding how to implement the proposed starter pack in the post-2027 CAP. It demonstrates the importance of linking the setting-up grant to other measures and ensuring that the resulting package is accessible to new entrants.

Box 1 - The starter pack in brief

The Starter Pack, which is described in European policy documents as a start-up package for young farmers, is not a single measure. Rather, it is a coordinated set of interventions designed to facilitate entry into the sector and the consolidation of a new business. The setting-up premium remains a central component, alongside investment support, financial instruments, training, advisory services, innovation and other forms of guidance.

The proposed regulation presented by the EC in July 2025 stipulates that setting-up support may be granted in the form of lump sums, financial instruments or a combination of both, up to a maximum of EUR 300,000. However, the funding levels, conditions of eligibility and overall design of the package may change during negotiations on the post-2027 regulatory framework (European Commission, 2025a; 2025b).

3. LESSONS FROM THE YOUNG FARMERS PACKAGE

ONE SINGLE PROJECT	**Several support tools** The setting-up premium, investments and other measures can contribute to the same business plan.

The YFP provides a useful reference point for understanding how integrated support for setting up can be put into practice. Introduced under the 2007-2013 Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) and reintroduced, with different configurations, in the 2014-2020 programming period, it linked the setting-up premium to the implementation of a business project, primarily through investment support and, in some cases, also through training, advisory services, diversification and cooperation (Tarangioli, 2012; Licciardo et al., 2024). This approach has also been maintained in the 2023-2027 programming period. In the Regional Supplements for Rural Development, setting-up support may be linked to other interventions, particularly investments, training and advisory services. However, significant regional disparity persists in the composition of the packages, the objectives pursued and the resources allocated (De Franco et al., 2024).

During the 2014-2020 programming period, the YFP was adopted by 13 out of 21 regional RDPs, with significant differences in how interventions were combined and in whether they were compulsory. This diversity reflects the autonomy granted to the Regions, but it also demonstrates that the same overall approach can result in very different support pathways in terms of content, access conditions and the commitments required from beneficiaries (Consentino et al., 2026).

The Italian experience offers at least four useful lessons for the design of the starter pack (European Commission, 2025a; Consentino et al., 2026):

- Integrating interventions to ensure that the premium, investments, training and advisory services do not remain separate measures;
- Placing the business plan at the heart of the project, so that it guides investment decisions, identifies needs and sets out the expected outcomes;
- Balancing regional flexibility with common criteria, allowing for local adaptation while maintaining a shared framework;
- Making support more accessible to new entrants, especially those without an existing farm or adequate resources.

Of these elements, the business plan plays a particularly important role. It defines the farm business's development objectives and identifies the necessary investments and interventions to achieve them. Evidence suggests that combining the setting-up premium with investment support improves the performance of beneficiary farms by strengthening their productivity, profitability, and capacity for innovation. However, this evidence cannot automatically be extended to all regional configurations of the Young Farmers Package. The Piedmont experience, for example, clearly demonstrates the instrument's capacity to facilitate joint access to multiple interventions. During the 2007-13 period, 92% of setting-up premium beneficiaries also utilised at least one other measure under the RDP, and 45% took up at least three additional measures. The majority of these were for on-farm investment and advisory services (IRES Piemonte, 2018). While these figures point to a high level of integration, they are insufficient to demonstrate greater economic effectiveness compared with the setting-up premium alone.

Differences in access to the YFP reflect regional variations in the composition of the package, the compulsory nature of the linked measures and the requirements placed on beneficiaries. More complex configurations could make project preparation more challenging, particularly for new entrants without an existing farm base or assets of their own (Consentino et al., 2026). For this reason, integration between interventions should be supported by coordinated procedures, predictable timelines, adequate advisory services, and sustainable financial conditions.

The business plan is the main element of continuity between the YFP and the future starter pack. Its purpose should not be limited to justifying the proposed investments; it should also help to assess the project's overall coherence, identify financial and training needs, and monitor the results achieved over time. The European Court of Auditors (2017) specifically emphasised the importance of using business plans more effectively in both selecting projects and assessing the support outcomes. Therefore, the central issue is not merely to increase the number of available interventions, but to create an accessible, consistent pathway for businesses from setting up to consolidation.

Table 1 - What the regional implementation of the Young Farmers Package teaches us

Aspect	Young Farmers Package	Starter pack
Policy framework	Integrated planning approach for RDPs, with different regional configurations.	Package of measures planned as part of the strategy for generational renewal.
Objective	Helping young farmers set up new businesses and implement their business plans by providing integrated access to a range of measures.	Supporting young farmers' entry into the sector and the consolidation of their business during the early years
Core instrument	Setting-up premium linked to the business plan.	Start-up support linked to the business plan.
Linked interventions	Mainly on-farm investments depending on regional choices: training, advisory services, diversification, and cooperation	Investments, access to credit and land, training, advisory services, and cooperation
Governance	Design and implementation within regional RDPs	Design within National Plans and implementation according to each Member State's institutional framework
Element of continuity	Central role of the business plan and integration of different forms of support	Central role of the business plan and integrated approach to setting-up a farm business

Source: authors' elaboration

4. THE YOUNG FARMERS PACKAGE: REGIONAL DIFFERENCES IN THE 2014-2020 RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

13 out of 21	**There is no single regional model** In the 2014-2020 programming period, thirteen regional RDPs adopted the Young Farmers Package with different combinations of measures and requirements.

The regional implementation of the YFP is a concrete example of how to provide integrated support for young farmers.

During the 2014-2020 programming period, the regions adopted a variety of approaches, combining the setting-up premium, investments, training, advisory services, diversification, and cooperation in different ways. This diversity reflects different regional needs and helps clarify when the package operates as a coordinated system rather than a collection of separate measures.

Lesson 1: There is no single regional model

The Regions implemented the YFP with varying degrees of intensity and different combinations of measures. Three main approaches can be identified:

- Packages focused mainly on the setting-up premium and on-farm investments;
- Broader packages, also including training, advisory services, diversification or cooperation;
- Packages with varying degrees of conditionality, depending on whether the linked measures are compulsory.

For the future implementation of the starter pack, the key issue will be to strike a balance between flexibility and integration: allowing room for local adaptation while ensuring that the premium, investments, skills and guidance are linked within a recognisable and coherent pathway. Monitoring should also move in this direction, focusing not only on the number of funded applications or the level of expenditure, but also at whether supported businesses remain active, complete their planned investments, make use of training and advisory services, and strengthen their business project.

Lesson 2: The package works when measures are properly coordinated

The key issue is not how many measures are included in the package, but how well they are coordinated. When the premium, investments and guidance were linked to a single business plan, the YFP played a more strategic role. Conversely, when the measures remained separate in procedural or financial terms, integration was less evident.

Lesson 3: Regional experience offers lessons for the new CAP

Regional experience points to several priorities for the starter pack: allowing room for territorial flexibility within a common framework; simplifying procedures; better coordinating timelines, resources and instruments; and monitoring not only expenditure or the number of beneficiaries, but also the continued activity of supported businesses, the quality of investments and their capacity for innovation.

Table 2 - What the regional implementation of the Young Farmers Package teaches us

Observed aspect	What emerges from regional implementation	Implications for the future CAP
Combination of measures	The Regions designed the packages by combining the setting-up premium, investments, training, advisory services, diversification and cooperation in different ways.	Territorial flexibility should be ensured within a common framework that sets minimum requirements for integrating measures, procedures and guidance.
Role of the setting-up premium	The premium remained the core measure, but its level of integration with other interventions varied across regions.	The setting-up premium remains useful, but its effects are stronger when linked to investments and guidance.
On-farm investments	In many regions, the setting-up premium was mainly combined with on-farm investments as the primary tool for implementing the objectives set out in the business plan.	Investments are crucial for translating the business plan into practice, but they are more effective when proportionate to the business objectives and supported by skills, advisory services and predictable administrative timelines.
Training and advisory services	Their role varied across regional configurations and was not always central.	Skills and technical assistance are crucial during the early years and should be an integral part of the pathway.
Degree of integration	In some cases, the package functioned as a coordinated pathway; in others, it remained largely a collection of separate measures.	The future implementation of the starter pack should ensure that integration is not merely formal.
Implementation and monitoring	Regional outcomes vary across contexts and are not always easily comparable.	Monitoring should focus not only on expenditure and the number of beneficiaries, but also at the continued activity of supported businesses and the project quality.

Source: authors' elaboration

5. FROM LESSONS TO ACTION

STARTER PACK	**Integrating measures is not enough** Young farmers need a genuinely unified, accessible and well-supported pathway.

The Italian experience shows that a package of interventions can strengthen support for young farmers only if integration is also built into administrative procedures and timelines, and technical support for beneficiaries.

For the upcoming programming period, the challenge will be designing a simple and accessible starter pack that works as a coordinated whole while remaining manageable for administrations.

A single entry point

Beneficiaries should experience the starter pack as a unified pathway, rather than a sequence of separate procedures. A single application, or an integrated project file, could link the setting-up premium, investments, training, advisory services and financial instruments, thereby reducing duplicate documentation, administrative handovers between departments, and mismatches between appraisal and payment timelines.

Selection criteria built around the overall project

In calls for applications, selection criteria should not reward only standalone requirements – such as age, location, farm size or type of investment – but should assess the overall coherence of the project. Higher scores should be assigned to business plans that clearly connect the premium, investments, training needs, advisory services and development objectives. In this way, the selection process would assess not only formal eligibility, but also the credibility and viability of the business plan.

Predictable appraisal and payment timelines

During the early years of a farm business, predictable timelines are crucial. Clear appraisal deadlines, rapid communication of outcomes and payments aligned with the investment schedule can reduce uncertainty, liquidity problems and difficulties in accessing credit.

Coordination with administrative bodies

Many on-farm investments require building, environmental, landscape, health or processing-related authorisations. For this reason, simplifying the starter pack should also involve coordination with the competent authorities, rather than relying solely on streamlined procedures within CAP interventions.

Technical support at the application stage

Advisory services, mentoring and clear information help young farmers develop realistic business plans, estimate costs and timelines correctly, and identify priority investments. This support is particularly useful for those with limited administrative experience and for people entering farming without taking over a family farm.

Specific attention to new entrants

Those who take over a family farm often start from a different position from those who set up a business from scratch. Criteria that are too rigid, for example on minimum size, guarantees or available assets, risk penalising the most innovative profiles, newly established small farms or projects that combine production, processing, direct sales and services.

Overall, the experience of the YFP shows that the effectiveness of the starter pack depends not only on the resources available, but also on the ability to turn multiple measures into a clear, coordinated pathway that is responsive to the needs of young farmers.

Monitoring should also move in this direction: it should not be limited to expenditure and the number of beneficiaries, but should monitor long-term business viability, the quality of projects, and the capacity of supported businesses to innovate and consolidate.

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