

EUROPEAN
EVALUATION
HELPDESK
FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT



GROUP DISCUSSION OUTCOMES

ASSESSING THE CONTRIBUTION OF RDPs TO A COMPETITIVE AND VIABLE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR

GOOD PRACTICE WORKSHOP
ONLINE, 09-10 DECEMBER 2020

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The Evaluation Helpdesk is responsible for the evaluation function within the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) by providing guidance on the evaluation of RDPs and policies falling under the remit and guidance of DG AGRI's Unit C.4 'Monitoring and Evaluation' of the European Commission (EC). In order to improve the evaluation of EU rural development policy the Evaluation Helpdesk supports all evaluation stakeholders, in particular DG AGRI, national authorities, RDP 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.

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GROUP DISCUSSION DAY 1 - Experiences from assessing competitiveness of the agri-food sector

Participants discussed in groups with the aim to answer a central question: How to assess the RDP contribution to the competitiveness of agriculture, taking into account the non-farming sector? The discussions are summarised in the mind map below. A more detailed account can be found in the Table 1 that follows.

Figure 1. Summary of group discussions on Day 1 of the Good Practice Workshop

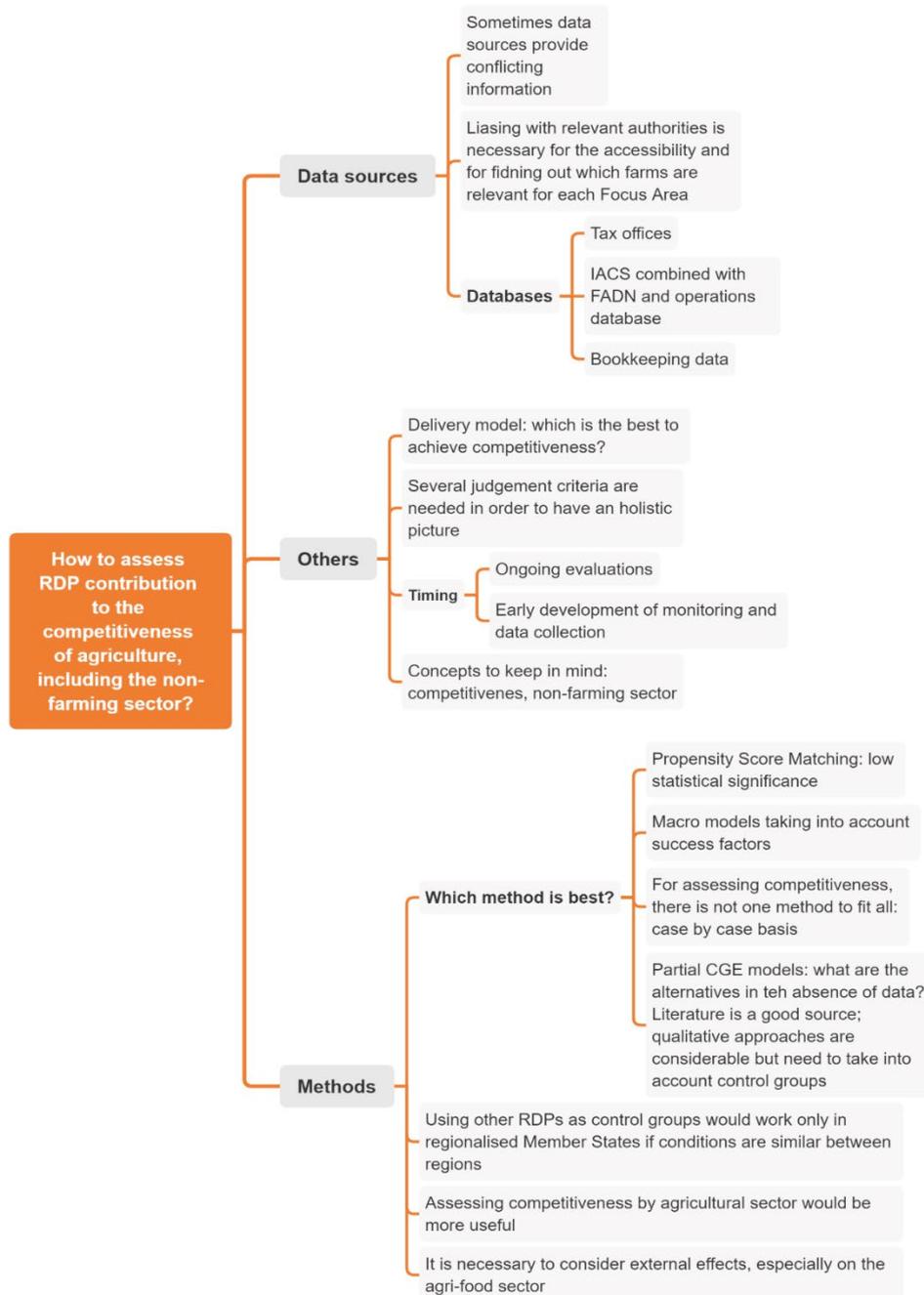


Table 1. Summary of the Group Discussion on the overall topic ‘How to assess RDP contribution for the competitiveness of agriculture, including the non-farming sector?’

TOPIC	Outcomes of the group discussions
<p>Approaches and methods</p>	<p>Several methods that work well:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PSM works well if there is sufficient and relevant data for it. However, in the case PSM-DID works well if successful. However, in the case of the Czech Republic it was not statistically significant. It relied on linear regression; more will be known when there is more data available. It needs to be complemented with qualitative assessment. • Macro models, e.g., in Austria, showed positive results for answering CEQ27. The main challenge was to find out success factors. However, there is still time to develop additional methodologies, mainly qualitative. • Partial or CGE models using : Average Treatment Effect on Treated (ATT) impact on support units; Average Treatment Effect on Non-Treated (ATNT); and Average Treatment Effect (ATE) : i.e. weighted of ATT and Average Treatment Effect on Non-Treated (ATNT) in construction of relevant elasticities. All these require sufficient data. The alternatives in the absence of data include inter alia: models with elasticity taken from literature; adjust elasticity without deeper estimation; use qualitative approaches with similar control-groups (asking for employment, turnover etc.). • The input-output model has been attempted in Italy, but it did not prove to be the correct approach. <p>Counterfactual:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessing the counterfactual is important but the capacity to assess it depends on several factors, for example, in Spain, investments were very recent. There was a survey about how investments were made in the area, but it was not possible to conduct PSM. • In regionalised RDPs, neighbouring regions can be added, if general conditions are similar (eligibility criteria etc.). This requires dummy variables in the control variables. It is not recommendable between different Member States or if farms characteristics differ strongly between regions. <p>Other approaches combining quantitative and qualitative:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For CEQ6, in Austria, the assessment was done by grouping sub-measures with impact on FA3A. Results showed an increase in business turnover. There were differences between technical departments. The assessment includes an analysis of the cooperation measures, to assess whether to continue with such measures. In general, case studies are needed: qualitative research is necessary when looking at several measures. • Overall, it was stressed that it is important to connect quantitative and qualitative information. Qualitative analysis involves asking beneficiaries about the impact of measures on the investment (the German cowsheds example). There are other effects beyond economic effects which have to be assessed with qualitative analysis (e.g., beneficiaries surveys, interviews, case studies). <p>The complexity of assessing competitiveness:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To understand the complexity of competitiveness, the approach can be either a panorama from an overall point of view, or a case by case microlevel analysis. • It is important to focus the evaluation of competitiveness on some sectors. It is difficult to extrapolate to all sectors. • A key conclusion is that there is no method that fits all.
<p>Judgment criteria and indicators</p>	<p>Judgment criteria can take into account:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different types of changes: e.g., digitalisation, innovation. • Qualitative aspects of the expected change. Qualitative aspects provide potential for new narrative in following programming periods, for example, it would be interesting to see qualitative aspects of quality schemes.

TOPIC	Outcomes of the group discussions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are other effects beyond economic effects which have to be assessed as well. <p>Additional indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider what does competitiveness mean in terms of indicators? Some examples: farm income, labour productivity. How to consider market dynamics? e.g., considering turnover (before and after RDP). • Accounting for how many local markets have been promoted in short chain e.g., number of training events conducted in order to achieve innovative cases, number of events established to exchange successful cases under M.16.1 (ES-Cataluña) • Some additional indicators proposed include inter alia: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – change in gross value added in supported holdings; – farmers satisfaction with respect to competitiveness; – position of farmers in the value chain (the aim is for a better positioning of farmer); – development of turnover of businesses; – development of value added of businesses; – quality of production processes; – capital structure of businesses (foreign capital, own capital); – employment effects; – production capacity (in terms of how capacities are used).
Data sources	<p>Availability:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are different data sources, the problems relate to the availability of data for small farms (Slovenia). • In the Netherlands there is a lot of data available but sometimes contradicting. Difficult to analyse the effects of a project. • Complementing data with qualitative sources as well. • Early development of data collection / monitoring (with view to the ex ante as well) is essential. E.g., a pilot project on FADN (Italy). <p>Accessibility:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A lot of liaising with finance authorities is needed in order to access the data, establishing good contacts with the Paying Agency (information required: anonymous account of farms supported per Focus Area), obtaining data from tax offices, etc. • IACS data gives a full picture, however, accessibility is a problem. <p>Quality:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The quality of data in the operations database is questionable as it is provided by beneficiaries based on their understanding on data requirements. • It is possible to observe economic changes based on information from beneficiaries after project completed as beneficiaries have to report up to 5 years after a project was completed. <p>Databases:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional databases are a good source. • Consider also data sources outside of the MA. • IACS combined with FADN and operations database (for control groups). • Farm bookkeeping data, if available. • Business register, e.g., in Slovenia, the non-agriculture sector must report as well, which leads to having very useful data from business register.
Other	<p>Concepts and scope:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The beneficiary is the agri-food company, but the question is on the primary producer, who is not the direct beneficiary.

TOPIC	Outcomes of the group discussions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is meant with "including the non-farming sector"? e.g., food processing sector (FA 2A and 3A). Does it go beyond competitiveness? e.g., job creation, gender equality, etc. <p>Capturing the whole picture:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are RDPs affecting the whole 'ecosystem'? How can small interventions have an influence in the whole sector? The microlevel is also important for policy making. Macro effects are important, but can they really occur? If not a lot of beneficiaries are reached, it is difficult to see these effects. <p>Accounting for external effects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is important to account for external factors. How to distinguish and analyse RDP and external effects? Food processing, short supply chains, quality schemes are very sensitive to external factors (e.g., Covid19). <p>Delivery model:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivery model of measures: which delivery model is the best to achieve competitiveness (intervention logic), with a view to the future? • Integrated supply chain projects (implemented in Italy) related to competitiveness of the area. Once completed, an assessment of the difference between single and integrated projects will be made.

GROUP DISCUSSION DAY 2 - Parallel sessions

Table 2. Summary of the Group Discussion on the presented case 'The use of holistic approaches for assessing RDP effects and impacts on the agro-business system as a whole'

Strengths of the method
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The holistic approach is relevant for answering all evaluation questions starting from the farms, it gives a vision of the direct measures that affect the rural dimension and the quality of life. It addresses the complexity of human relations.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is interesting that the method allows for the triangulation within the method as well as for the triangulation with respect to understanding the meaning of the figures of indicators.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An econometric exercise can never take into account the dynamics of sectors, farmers and other stakeholders and explain underlying reasons, as this holistic approach can.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One of the most interesting aspects of the approach is the proximity to the farmer via the 2-hours interview.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The method shows how the programme operates, the strategic decision making of farmers and their awareness.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On the issue of young farmers and structural change, understanding the strategy is very important but there are also conflicts within the strategies as the visions of older and younger farmers often differ. Structural change implies an issue of culture which is very relevant for the holistic approach.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If the focus is on the indicators, then it is better addressing the labour productivity using FADN data and add a satellite of FADN and using the estimates in the same way. For environmental indicators, there is an interesting body of research showing the effects of the measures and the use of geospatial models. However, indicators are concepts, not figures. It is very challenging to quantify impact indicators that are very narrowly defined. Indicators are not always enough. It is important to have a broader focus to see if the behaviours of farmers are stable or not.
Limitations and their proposed solutions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limitation: In usual evaluations, the issue is compartmentalised by answering CEQ one by one and then build from that the bigger picture. The holistic approach goes from the overall picture to individual responses, needing to find out the specifics from what has been learnt overall. What kind of challenges does this other way imply?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proposed solution: The holistic approach is like recreating a Theory of Change. Working on the clusters allows identifying the needs of the clusters, which imply at the same time finding the criteria and the questions. This helps better structuring the evaluation questions.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limitation: Is it really an approach that can be used for regular evaluations? Cost and time are higher than the costs of regular evaluation. Also, how can holistic approaches be applied in our case of Common Evaluation Questions organised by Focus Area and so on and so forth?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proposed solution: The costs of the holistic approach are high, but they could be higher if it is necessary to do direct surveys in order to collect all the data in the FADN format. With this method, in a way, all CEQ regarding farms are addressed, so it can be less expensive than methods which address vertically each Focus Area.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limitation: What are the methodological implications of the Covid-19 pandemic? Online interviews are quite difficult with farmers especially due to broadband connection problems. In the context of the pandemic, it is very difficult to do field work.

The role of Managing Authorities

- The value of really knowing the attitude and **disposition of farmers** has the potential to really tailor future programmes and future targets, as it can better highlight what really works as an **incentive**.
- When designing the next programming period in Hungary, these aspects are very important for the Managing Authority, as there is a real attempt to **incorporate the results of the evaluations** into the next period.
- Evaluations are growing in importance and in tools; they need to be more holistic. At the end of the day, the **holistic picture is what matters most to policy makers**.
- In situations where there is not an ongoing process or evaluation, the Swedish Managing Authority (MA) is trying to set up a process that could account as much as possible before doing the **tendering for the ex post**. This approach is useful for the Managing Authority to set the scope of the ex post: what is expected from the evaluation, what does the Managing Authority want to know from the evaluation?
- What could be the **role of the Managing Authorities in facilitating** this new approach in order to get valuable insights for policy making as well?
- Managing Authorities are part of the panel of experts and the coordination. The intention of this kind of approach is much more related to **transferring the results to the Managing Authority** so that the policy can be designed in a better way.
- The method highlighted the importance of **communication with the Managing Authority**. In terms of transferability, if there is a national programme with lots of differences within the country, maybe a good idea would be to divide it in homogeneous areas and clusters in terms of experts.

Methodological Q&A

- It would be very interesting to see the **questionnaire** used as well as the criteria against which the sustainability, environmental and economic aspects were measured.
- The intentions of farmers are collected with a survey, have their strategies been understood through the different measures and then trying to understand what they are aiming to do?
- The questionnaire **started from the strategy** that they had before the rural development contribution. Departing from competitiveness, environment, and the linkage with the territory in which they are. During the questionnaire, they may switch the attention to the contribution of rural development support, always in term of their strategy. Through interviews, the evaluator tries to understand to which cluster each farmer belongs to and what made the **strategies of the farmers evolve**.
- Is the **FADN survey** done every year?
- The FADN survey is conducted every year. There is an incremental sample, where all the beneficiaries of the RDP are already present.
- Is the **questionnaire specific to a Focus Area**? In such case, there is a good probability that the same beneficiary is going to be called up in several questionnaires.
- The universe was divided in different subpopulation according to the number of measures that are being followed. Once a beneficiary is selected, he/she is selected for a measure depending on the measure and the size of farm. The questionnaire **addresses all the focus areas**. Depending on the holding, the questionnaire will focus more in one aspect or another. E.g., in the context of farmers' awareness, there can be the case of an organic farmer, who does not necessarily think they are also contributing to stocking carbon or reducing emissions. Communication is important to cross behaviours. The results of the study are used as well for the communication plan of the Managing Authority.

- How is **the panel of experts defined**?
- The panel of experts **depends on the region**. One key aspect is to involve the technical level professionals that have a broad knowledge of the territory, for example in the context of farms associations. Furthermore, it is important to mix researchers from universities, associations, and very importantly, the Managing Authority who will understand and use the results.
- How was the **bias of farmers** who are willing to have an interview accounted for?
- Beneficiaries are obliged to answer to evaluation, audit, etc. The Managing Authority sent a letter, and the sample was random, with a very low refusal rate.

Table 3. Summary of the Group Discussion on the presented case ‘How the sustainability of short and long supply chains contributes to competitiveness’

Improving the influence of evaluation in the policy cycle
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation is a component of the policy and it amplifies its effects. We are entering a new phase of the policies and it is very important to understand to what extent they will be able to react to the diverse needs.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When designing the monitoring and evaluation system, what are we going to assess in the new policy? What will be the focus? And this should be built on the assessment of the current situation to have a clear understanding of the baseline. • In ex ante evaluations the targets (especially environmental) should also be evaluated in relation to the capacity to collect this data to provide evidence.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness: It is important that evaluations reach the policy-makers and stakeholders.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usability: It is very important to focus on what is really needed to assess, how useful it is?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supply chains: This is a huge and diverse field. We have interbranch organisations, we have producer groups, short chains, etc. Should we make a <u>different analysis for the different type of organisations</u> / chains or should we make some kind of overall panorama, which would be more like a <u>territorial approach</u>?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We need to consider changing also the objectives of evaluation because we are going more and more into the sustainable development goal framework.
Methods
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mix of quantitative and qualitative approaches for triangulation is very important.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of networks: Use the theory of structural holes, which says that people tend to activate links. In order to activate links, they are going to fill these structural holes.
Data
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data collection systems: We have to update them; to start considering open data. Figure out how the new wave of <u>digitalisation</u> will help us in improving evaluation. • Data fragmentation is also an issue - centralisation of data is necessary. • Access to data should be improved inter alia through long-term collaboration between Managing Authorities, Paying Agencies and evaluators (in Hungary for example, evaluators, MA and PA are working together in the design of the monitoring and evaluation system for the next period). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The <u>Paying Agency</u> can collect data from beneficiaries, Managing Authorities should design the data collection system (including non-beneficiaries) together with evaluators. – The involvement of <u>evaluators</u> in the design is especially important in cases when new indicators are introduced, and in cases when there is no valid data source. – Academia has a lot of data a lot of background information that can be provided in the evaluation process. <u>Universities</u> can also collect data, but their duty to collect data could be more related to, for example, proposing new indicators and/or make some pilot studies. – Some institutionalisation of this relation (not with a single evaluator but institutional relation between managing authorities, universities or research centres) should be established. – Collect data from stakeholders in <u>networks</u>.

New indicators and concepts

- **Capacity creation:** There are many indicators: the trust among people, the rules they have established, the respect of these rules, the compliance if the rules are written or not written (if they are written it means that there is a further level of normalisation), the number of initiatives they take together (for example, if they have workshops), etc.
- **Synergies versus competition.** It is possible to have both at the same time.
- **Redefining the meaning of competitiveness.** Are we competing with our neighbours, are we competing as Europe, are we competing as nations against other nations? This is not always clear. Perhaps there is a need to consider the concept of competitive advantage, then it might be something that will be a bit harder than the concept of rivalry between individual firms.
- Alternatively, we could be considered the concept of differentiation for example differentiation as a new competition strategy. To assess this, the entrepreneur can be asked: what would be the possibility of interaction with other entrepreneurs?
- Example: This definition of competitiveness is similar to how the Estonian Managing Authority wants to see the short supply chains and policies that support it.

Table 4. Summary of the Group Discussion on 'Making best use of FADN for the assessment of competitiveness in agriculture', based on expert input by Jerzy Michalek

What CEQs are linked to the assessment of RDP effects on fostering competitiveness?
CEQ 4 is focused on supported farms: data should be representative for farm support but not for the whole agricultural sector.
CEQ 27 focuses on the whole agriculture: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spill over effects to be considered. • Whole sector. • Requires answering CEQ 4 first. • Data to be representative for the whole agricultural sector. • The difference is described in the guidelines (Annex 11), for CEQ 27.
Why is micro-farm data needed to answer CEQ 4?
<p>The 'effect' is always a 'net effect'</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gross-effects are not appropriate (contain other influencing, incl. exogenous non-RDP related factors) • ATT indicator combined with information on the programme <p>Some tips on how to collect data for net effects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-beneficiaries need to be included (e.g. in FADN) or asked as well (e.g. through a beneficiary survey). • In qualitative studies, do not ask for "net effect" but ask about the development of a certain indicator (labour productivity, income...), e.g. What is the percentage of increase...? To what extent has it contributed to the decrease of fertilisers? • Comparability is difficult (even with FADN), therefore advanced, e.g. matching methods need to be applied. • The use of case studies is possible. Case selection is important in qualitative methods / comparability factors to be considered.
What to expect from a sample of micro-farm data to be representative for answering CEQ 4?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different characteristics to describe the total population of supported farms (and not for the whole agricultural sector!). • FADN gives basic characteristics (size etc.). • How much subsidies farmer received under FA2A from other FAs (or previous RDP?) • How to consider beneficiaries not contributing to FA2A? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Do not consider them. ○ CEQ 4 only concerns FA2A (in contrast to CEQ 27, which concerns the whole agricultural sector) ○ What if the FADN sample is not representative? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Take neighbours if possible. – Use qualitative methods. – Independent survey to collect number of beneficiaries to be included (more than 300 + non-beneficiaries) – If the number of treated farms in the FADN sample is too small, even if merging RDPs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Include other RDPs and use dummy variable on the location of the farm. ❖ Bureaucratic obstacles to use data from neighbouring RDPs.

What are the basic sources of farm micro-data?

- FADN is not designed to be representative of CAP beneficiaries.
- Farm-bookkeeping data is preferable as a larger data-sample, less delays (1 year, for FADN 2 years).
- Surveys.

What if the sample size is too small?

- Include neighbouring RDPs:
 - Similar eligibility criteria.
 - Include the location of the farm as a control variable.
 - See the shift of the effect of programme.

Are FADN variables sufficient to answer CEQ 4?

- Generally, FADN variables are sufficient to answer CEQ 4.
- Include the amount of subsidies received under other FAs.
- Consider both primary and secondary contributions? (e.g. farms supported under Priority 4) - according to the EC no (split primary and secondary effects and add them up at the end!).
- The level of subsidies under the FA is needed (from PA).
- Access to PA data is necessary and PA-data needs to be linked anonymously.
- Linking to be done by the PA or by the evaluator if the ID of the farm is known.
- ID number of farms helps to merge anonymously the PA and FADN data set.

Is FADN information on small farms sufficient to answer CEQ 4?

- Yes, FADN contains info on small farms, but...
 - "Small" is specific for each country.
 - Thresholds for standard outputs different in each country.
 - Comparability between countries is questionable.
 - FADN aims to be representative of commercial farms (thresholds defined).

Table 5. Summary of the Group Discussion on 'The effects of the changing context on the implementation of RDPs along the value chain and consequences for the evaluation activities', based on expert input by Marili Parissaki

Definition of changing context
<p>By 'changing context' we mean external factors that have considerable capacity to generate unanticipated outcomes in terms of policy implementation, e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • effects of other programmes • financial / economic crisis • socio-economic consequences caused by Covid-19 • the EU response with providing recovery effort for rural development
Effects in the value chain
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The effects can be on all stages of the value chain: production, processing, distribution, consumption.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Example from Greece: changes in the consumption regarding tourism, restaurants. There are many effects at the end of the chain. In the production, there are changes in some sectors for example wine, cotton, or olive oil, which are affected negatively. And there are also positive effect changes, in the production of oranges and lemons, because they are very good for health. Flowers on the other side are negatively affected. It depends on the kind of crop.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are also megatrends. Farmers produce. Is not organic the fastest growing sector in agriculture? This will have an effect on the production, processing, etc.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Example from Hungary: a new trend is the demand for more packaged products because they are safer. Regarding the processing: people have to be more separated from each other and this can affect negatively. There is contradictory information regarding local consumption, some say that local markets benefited from the pandemic, but others say they did not because the local markets were closed, due to more contact than in big retail sector, and that did not have a good effect on local channels.
Changes in the evaluation objectives & scope
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Besides Covid-19, the European Green Deal with the Biodiversity Strategy and Farm to Fork Strategy might change the scope of evaluations especially the ex ante.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation can help to measure adaptability, to support beneficiaries to be more resilient to the crisis, to identify alternative solutions and measures for the transition. A broader scope than Covid-19 is needed considering that this crisis has only made more remarkable the already existing needs in the rural areas.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The measure on adaptability is very interesting but it depends on the uptake of RDPs. Example of a region in Italy: the most part is already programmed, it is quite difficult to adapt the RDP. Especially Covid-19 but also other crises can change the environment or sustainability in general of rural areas - with Covid-19 the environment improved in some way. Moving the scope from purely competitiveness to other dimensions (sustainability) would be interesting.
Implications for evaluation topics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scale of impact of Covid-19 in relation to what was originally being done. • Implications of RDPs at the local level. • Example of flood crisis.
Evaluation elements and methods
<p>Use of online surveys.</p>

The evaluator will have to have the knowledge or capacity to assess the impact of Covid-19, so it will become more complex. It is not a continuum of data, maybe it is interesting to look at the trends of indicators - not only before-after but before, middle and after.

Scope of revising the intervention logic

In terms of Covid-19, it could accelerate the effects of policy. For example, public money for payment of ecosystem services would be accelerated (this suddenly becomes a source of income).

Additional evaluation elements

- Priority 6 may include a specific evaluation question for competitiveness for FA 6A and FA 6B, as there is for FA 2A (e.g. tourism is affected).
- Proposed programme-specific evaluation question: Has the adjustment of the RDP to changes in external economic, social and other conditions caused by the Covid-19 crisis been adequate, coherent, effective, cost efficient and timely (e.g. speed of response to Covid-19)?
- It is necessary to know to what extent planned RDP activities were disrupted.
- The focus should be set on the results: if the results expected were achieved or not, and regarding innovation to what extent was new innovation cooperation needed. CEQ 4 about economic performance, restructuring and modernisation is important.

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