



Subgroup on Innovation for agricultural productivity and sustainability

10th Meeting

22 February 2018

REPORT



Introduction

The Subgroup on Innovation met for the tenth time in Brussels on 22 February 2018. The **meeting's agenda** [\[link\]](#) covered four topics:

- I. Work programme of the EIP-AGRI network, with special focus on the first half of 2018
- II. Improving the connection among Operational Groups (OGs) at EU level
- III. Evaluation of innovation in Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) and assessment of agricultural innovation in general
- IV. Results of the self-assessment of the EU Rural Networks and relevance for the EIP-AGRI network

Session I – Ready, steady, go: launching new EIP-AGRI networking activities for 2018

Koen Desimpelaere (EIP-AGRI Service Point) presented the **state of play of EIP-AGRI activities** [\[link\]](#).

Three speakers provided information on the launch of **calls for experts for three new Focus Groups (FGs)**:

- FG 29 "New feed for pigs and poultry" (Remco Schreuder, Service Point)
- FG 30 "Protecting fruit production from frost damage" (Sirpa Karjalainen, DG AGRI)
- FG 31 "Reducing food loss on the farm" (Antonella Zona, DG AGRI)

It was announced that all three calls were going to be launched in the week of 26 February and will close on 3 April 2018. [\[link to the three presentations\]](#)

A round of questions and comments on the calls followed:

- Q on FG 31: Will both phases of before and after harvest be considered? A: Only losses till farm gate are considered.
- A Thematic Network with a similar topic as FG 31 has started recently and it is suggested to cooperate.
- Q on FG 31: Will the use of by-products for feed be considered? A: Yes.
- The suggestion was raised to keep an eye on the connection between the topics of FG 29 and FG 31.

Anikó Seregélyi (DG AGRI) informed about the preparation of the Workshop "Connecting innovative projects: water & agriculture"

- The workshop will take place on 30-31 May 2018 in Almeria, Spain
- The format of the workshop will be 1,5 days (with field visit)

- Participants: 80 participants by invitation, composed of OGs, H2020 Multi-actor projects, Thematic Networks. Furthermore it is intended to involve relevant LIFE projects and Action Groups / projects of the EIP Water. FG members of Water and agriculture, Managing Authorities and / or NRNs linked to the OGs will also be among the participants.
- State of play preparation:
The first screening on potential water related projects has been done. The next step will be to match the projects having as core group the Operational Groups.
The save the date message will be sent to OGs and will inform relevant MAs and NRNs on 6 March 2018.

The draft agenda will be published in the coming weeks [on the event website](#).

Fabio Cossu (DG AGRI) informed about the preparation of two activities in the context of communicating the digital transformation in agriculture [\[link\]](#):

- the workshop “Enabling farmers for the digital age: the role of AKIS”, to be held in Latvia on 26-27 April 2018;
- building a “digital toolbox in the form of a web-based repository of examples of tools (case studies, fiches,..) projects, templates, etc. [based on available information](#)

A round of questions and comments on the activities followed:

- In Hungary, there will not be any OGs in the near future. For the first Workshop on water it was possible to appoint someone who is a member of a potential OG. It would be good if this could be done again for the next workshop.
- It would be very helpful if a title in English could be made available for all OGs (aside from the title in national languages).

Session II – Improving OG connection and upscaling their results

Rob Peters (DG AGRI) introduced the topic, mentioning that DG AGRI is aware of approximately 500 active OGs so far. More than 3000 OGs are planned by 2020. One of the key tasks for the network is to create a platform where OGs and other innovation actors can be connected in order to upscale the results of their projects and to foster a thriving innovation ecosystem in agriculture at the European level.

Fabio Cossu explained that the EIP-AGRI website contains a map on approved OGs in Europe (which currently holds 300 OGs). There are two ways to access an overview of these OGs on the EIP-AGRI homepage:

- Via the “meeting point” / “ search interesting projects” [\[link\]](#)
- Via “My-EIP-AGRI” / “Operational Groups” [\[link\]](#)

Several members of the Subgroup welcomed the new information available on the website.

- Francesca Bampa, Scientific Project Administrator of LANDMARK presented the experience gained on creating connections between a Horizon 2020 Multi-actor project with OGs [\[link\]](#)
- Started in 2015; lasts for 54 months; 5 countries, 32 workshops;

- Focus on soil functions, has developed a soil navigator (on farm level); there will be a call for farmers who would like to evaluate the soil navigator.
- In March, a report will be published on participants' needs.
- Ray Keatinge, Head of R&D, presented the experience of EuroDairy, a Horizon 2020 Thematic Network () [\[link\]](#)
- Started in 2016, ends in 2019; with aim to improve sustainability; scope is to link with 40 OGs (early ones from the UK and NL (not official ones), official ones, independent ones (not official))
- Plans to have a workshop on water
- Offer to farmers: support to make an application, knowledge exchange, share intelligence, inspiration

Based on the information collected before the meeting, many activities connecting OGs took place recently: 19 members of the Subgroup were involved in or aware of such activities in 10 Member States (MS). Workshops are the predominant type of connecting activity, followed by cross-visits and Focus Groups. Participants include OGs, NRNs, MAs, H2020 projects (MAP), farmers, advisers, Innovation Support Services, producers' organisations, researchers, teachers and the EIP-AGRI Service Point [\[link\]](#).

Several members of the Subgroup gave flash presentations about recent and ongoing activities aiming at connecting Operational Groups with other OGs or with H2020 Multi-actor projects":

- Exchange on OGs between Austria and Germany (Mirjam Linninger, Austrian NRN)
Informal day with 7 OGs from AT and three from DE, aimed at getting informal feedback to the ministry. Focus was on implementation of call system and it included a fieldtrip, speed dating, flipcharts, informal dinner
- Events organised by the NRN in Germany (National Rural Network Unit/ DVS/ Natascha Orthen)
Had a first meeting in 2016, a second one on 5-6 March 2018 and included results from Bundeslander (MA and OG and information facilitator presenting), a market place (posters, >60) and tables with themes
- Mapping synergies between all agroforestry OGs (EURAF/ Nuria Ferreiro Dominguez)
Has started a Thematic Network on forestry, to establish connections between Multi-actor projects and OGs – creating an interactive map with all forestry OGs
- Meeting event for all OGs in Finland, by NRN and MA (Leena Anttila/ Ministry of agriculture and forestry)
Had a meeting in January, with national RN and MA. Asked OG if they were interested, and 7 out of 8 came. Aim was to get to know more about the challenges, so that MA can create support system. Estonian colleagues joined, to introduce call for cross-border cooperation.
- Opening of call in Slovenia (Chamber of agriculture and forestry/ Anton Jagodic)
Call has opened and will close on 25 May. Two big promotional events have taken place, to bring together researchers, farmers, advisers to talk about problems that should be solved in different sectors.
- Closing of call in Estonia (Ministry of Rural Affairs/ Helena Pärenson)
Budget for 2 to 3 projects. Four applications have been submitted, Threshold: certain amount of points have to be reached. Results out in June 2018. Partners from Finland and Italy.

Continuation of Session II – Improving OG connection and upscaling their results

- Inge Van Oost (DG AGRI) gave a presentation about the synergies between OGs and Horizon 2020 Multi-Actor Projects, including Thematic Networks [\[link\]](#)
- Margarida Ambar (EIP-AGRI Service Point) informed about a study on OGs [\[link\]](#)
 - The tender has been launched and one applicant has already been chosen. Margarida introduced the external expert that will do the study (IDEA Consult/ Steven Knotter)
 - The report is planned to be finalised in November 2018

An interactive session followed with the objective to discuss ideas for improving the connection among Operational Groups at EU level. The results are summarised in **Annex 1**.

Concluding the session, Rob Peters highlighted that the construction of the database and the study on OGs are important steps for developing an exchange platform for OGs; this platform would provide contacts and information, to allow for exchange on themes between OGs in a region, a country and across borders. He reminded everyone that current RDPs allow for the budgeting of exchange activities. The future CAP aims at introducing a new delivering model, giving Member States more flexibility to organise their programmes in order to achieve common targets and objectives. More attention to knowledge transfer and innovation is to be expected; this will not be imposed top-down, but will come from bottom-up.

Session III - Evaluating innovation

Hannes Wimmer, Team Leader at the European Evaluation Helpdesk for Rural Development presented the guidelines on evaluating innovation in RDPs . [\[link\]](#)

The rest of the session was dedicated to the information available to the members of the Subgroup regarding the assessment of innovation in agriculture. Based on the information collected before the meeting, several studies/research work were recently carried out and other types of activities took place on this topic: [\[link\]](#). Several members of the Subgroup informed about such studies or activities:

- Learning through ongoing evaluation in Sweden (NRN/ Nilla Nilsson-Linde) [\[link\]](#)
- Study Austria 2025 Innovation (Austrian Chamber of Agriculture/ Lisa Piller)
Austrian institute of economic research has published a study in August 2017. The methodology used is a survey among farmers, or a Community Innovation Survey, that focuses on resources, family structure, cooperation among farms. However, the outcome of the study could not be shared as the study can only be accessed paying a fee.
- Self-assessment for OGs in Germany (National Rural Network Unit/ DVS/ Natascha Orthen)
Innovation broker has a checklist that OGs can use, to see if how they work will lead to a successful project.
- University developed an approach in Lithuania (Rasa Pakelienė/ Aleksandras Stulginskis university (ASU))

National payment agency has used a 'three stages methodology' to assess the efficiency of OGs

At the end of the session Steven Knotter (IDEA Consult) introduced the ongoing AGROPOL project aiming to make a blueprint for cross-border cooperation in agriculture. It deals with issues like how to set up a partnership, how to include the value chain perspective. He invited members to provide feedback.

Session IV – Can we do better?

Antonella Zona and Koen Desimpelaere presented the results of the self-assessment of the EU Rural Networks, specifically focusing on recommendations for EIP-AGRI. [\[link\]](#)

Findings were in general positive; a majority of those involved in the self-assessment consider that the EIP-AGRI network is succeeding in establishing a dialogue between farmers and the research community.

Main suggestions for the future aim at strengthening the link between European and national networking activities (e.g. activities on similar topics), improving cooperation between the two EU Rural Networks and taking better care of the follow-up of activities.

Next steps and closing

Alberto D'Avino closed the meeting by listing the networking activities planned until the end of June 2018 [\[link\]](#). The next meeting of the Subgroup on Innovation will take place on **Tuesday 5 June 2018** in Brussels.



The detailed agenda of the meeting and all presentations can be found [on the EIP-AGRI website](#).

Annex 1 – Harvesting from Session II – “Improving OG connection and upscaling their results”

Five questions were discussed during the breakout session. The main conclusions are reported below.

1. What are the reasons why OGs should cooperate from their point of view? What’s in it for them?

There are good reasons why Operational Groups want to cooperate with others:

1. **To broaden their knowledge:** they can learn from other methodologies on how to run an Operational Group, they can improve their own project, they can discover alternatives on the content, learn to conform better. It can help them not to start from scratch. It avoids duplication.
2. **To set up other/new projects:** They can find new partners and broaden their financial base. Some follow-up activities might be needed after the finalisation of an Operational Group based on the outcomes of the closed Operational Group (e.g. a follow-up activity could be: how to bring a developed product or tool to the market).
3. **Dissemination of results or outputs:** Operational Groups might have an interest in disseminating their output, especially if they have created a product or tool. Dissemination can attract other Operational Groups.
4. **Intrinsic motivation:** Operational Groups can be proud of the results and they have nothing to lose.

2. What are practical obstacles that keep OGs from cooperating with others outside the OG? How would you tackle the obstacles?

1. **Lack of time and awareness:** particularly when preparing the application, partners are very focused on their internal project issues and, therefore, such kind of activity is frequently left out at that moment
2. **Additional costs are an issue:** when preparing the application it is hard to predict the precise cost of travels or meetings that are going to take place sometime ahead (can be years); it is possible to change the initial budget, but it’s difficult – anyway, it’s a limitation; but, if these costs are not included from the start, in the application, then it’s even more difficult; therefore, there’s the need for some level of flexibility from MAs, PAs and also from EU auditors
3. **Lack of easy access to info** with contacts and content on relevant projects / experts
4. **Personal skills:** the coordinator of the OG project (and partners) is not always a networker; doesn’t have the skills, nor the knowledge and is not aware or sensitive to the benefits of this type of activity

3. What are external incentives (stimulants) for cooperation for OGs? How can cooperation between OGs be stimulated?

1. **Money**
 - a. To support cross-border cooperation, or even a call for a cross-border OG. This can be done on MS level or in agreement with different MS

- b. Cross-visits, like “Erasmus for OG”. As mentioned when discussing Q4, a measure in the current RDP gives support for these exchange visits.
- 2. Not really an external incentive but reach out for **intrinsic motivation** of the OG participants.
 - i. Willingness of OG’ participants to communicate, take a look outside their own farm or business, meet colleagues and learn.
 - ii. OG participants are proud of their achievement, which they want to share with others.
- b. Tailored process
 - i. Invest in people
 - ii. Involving people
 - iii. Process in the long run to establish connections
 - iv. Different kinds of events, building on one another
- c. Communication is key!
 - i. Webinars
 - ii. Farmers weekly (paper press)
 - iii. Farm visits
 - iv. Feedback
- d. Networking events
 - i. Project leaders meeting (example SWE, EST)
 - ii. Between OG (DE/AU; PT summit) Give the floor to establish cooperation
 - iii. Face-to-face (and not Facebook)

4. How do NRN / MA support cooperation among OGs? What else can they do?

What works well and needs to be continued:

1. Keeping a database of OGs. It should be public and allow for thematic groupings
2. Organising meetings with exiting OGs and potential future OGs
3. Website to disseminate innovation projects
4. National and regional Focus Groups
5. Platforms for innovation actors to interact
6. Keeping a database for brokers (CZ)
7. Permanent working group on innovation (ES)
8. Competence centres like in Portugal (PT)

Ideas for future improvement:

1. Use RDP funding for knowledge exchange
2. Cross-border / cross-regional linking of OGs
3. NRN additional funding to bring OGs together
4. Enable an innovation environment for exchange of ideas
5. More information for existing OGs about how they could cooperate
6. Use other instruments, like Erasmus

5. What do Multi-Actor Projects (including Thematic Networks) do to involve OGs? What else can they do?

1. Sufficient time and resources for **preparation** is very important to find the right people: get organised to contact farmers and other people with practical experience – through farmers' organisations, advisers, NRNs – and contact farmers through people they know.
2. **Workshops** – truly interactive – including **field visits** – these are essential if you want practical people, including farmers to stay interested
3. Organise **exchange visits** – again including field visits
4. **Farmers as equal partners**; and farmers involved in OGs in the project advisory board
5. **Plenty of practice abstracts** – use appropriate language – clear and concise - and ensure dissemination
6. **Videos** by farmers
7. Invite **experts from other countries**
8. Don't overload the pioneers – **ensure also other farmers are involved**