

Evaluation study of the implementation of the European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability



About the EIP-AGRI

The **European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability (EIP-AGRI)** was launched in 2012 to speed up innovation and foster a competitive and sustainable agricultural and forestry sector that “achieves more from less”. To accelerate the process of developing and applying novel approaches, the EIP-AGRI uses an overarching concept based on the “**interactive innovation model**”. Actors with complementary knowledge (practical, entrepreneurial, scientific, etc.) work together in projects to develop solutions to practical problems, make them ready to put into practice and disseminate project results to a wider audience. The EIP-AGRI aims to achieve this through a Member State component and an EU-level component.



- The **Member State component** funds innovation actors (farmers, advisors, researchers, businesses, NGOs, etc.) within the Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) in the form of Operational Groups. **Operational Groups** are targeted innovation projects that tackle specific practical issues and opportunities according to the needs of the agricultural and forestry sector. The composition of an Operational Group is tailored to the aims of the specific project and will vary from project to project – they can be made up of – for instance – farmers, farmers' organisations, advisors, researchers, NGOs, businesses or anyone else who has something to bring to the table.
- The **EU component** consists of the **EIP network**, which aims to connect Operational Groups, facilitate the exchange of knowledge, expertise and good practices and to establish a dialogue between the farming and the research community. The EIP network is run by the European Commission (DG AGRI) and facilitated by the Service Point, a team of experts that organises a help desk function, the EIP website and database, events and the production and dissemination of publications.

EU research and innovation policy (through the EU framework programme, Horizon 2020) plays a key role in the EIP-AGRI by providing funding for actions according to the interactive innovation model and through its focus to connect actors across Member States' borders in demand-driven multi-actor projects. This is particularly important because actions under the RDPs implemented by Member States and regions are normally applied within the boundaries of a single programming area.

Evaluation study

In 2016, independent consultants, Coffey International Development, conducted an evaluation study of the EIP-AGRI, for the European Commission (DG AGRI). The study identified the strengths and weaknesses of the EIP-AGRI, opportunities and threats, and made recommendations to improve it. The study team spoke to key actors across the Member States, including government officials, farmers' representatives, academic researchers and businesses. Given the fact that EIP-AGRI has only just begun to be implemented, final Operational Group project results were not yet available when the research took place. For this reason, the study relied to a large extent on approved implementation plans (RDPs) and related national legislation, first calls and on the likely effectiveness and efficiency of the activities that are expected to follow.

Key conclusions from the study

The study found that the EIP-AGRI is a flexible tool which addresses the gap between practice and research in a way that is adapted to divergent circumstances and policy contexts. Farmers are more likely to become involved in the innovation process under the EIP-AGRI as compared with other funding streams for innovation in the agricultural sector.

- **Member States and regions are enthusiastic about the EIP-AGRI**

Although the EIP-AGRI approach was voluntary for Member States and regions, its uptake has been impressive. The vast majority of RDPs (96 out of 111, across 26 Member States) have programmed for the EIP-AGRI and devoted substantial resources to it. This is unusual for a new measure, and demonstrates the need for its distinctive approach to innovation.

- **The EIP-AGRI helps farmers play a role in innovation and supports co-creation**

The EIP approach seeks to encourage farmers to be active participants in the co-creation of innovative solutions, rather than passive recipients

of theoretical or difficult-to-apply knowledge. It leads to a focus on projects which facilitate co-ownership of innovative solutions that will more readily be applied. The bottom-up approach should guarantee that needs of farmers and forest managers are tackled and that emerging innovative opportunities may find funding that previously was unavailable. While there are many initiatives focused on innovation at European and Member State / regional levels, the study found that the EIP-AGRI's **bottom-up and farmer-led approach is truly distinctive and highly appreciated by farmers and stakeholders.**

- **The EIP-AGRI is aimed at solving practical problems**

Individual Operational Groups funded by Member States and regions are highly diverse. But most are dealing with relevant issues from a practical perspective, and bringing together the desired innovation actors. Assuming that a substantial proportion of the 3,205 Operational Groups foreseen by Member States and regions are formed, it is highly likely that they will lead to a large number of innovative solutions to practical agricultural and forestry problems.

- **The EIP-AGRI bridges a gap between research and practice**

Despite big differences in the agricultural context and innovation infrastructure across the 28 Member States, farmers and forest managers across the EU agree there are sometimes difficulties linking research and practice. The **flexibility** of the EIP-AGRI allows it to tackle this and **to be shaped to widely different circumstances.**

- **Lump sum support encourages participation in the EIP-AGRI**

The study found some evidence that farmers and other small agricultural businesses may be deterred from applying for funding as a result of the **lack of advance funding** and the administrative burden associated with the EIP-AGRI. Where Member States and regions provide lump-sum support for setting-up an

Operational Group coupled with a **relatively simple application process** for Operational Group project plans, this encourages farmers, business, and researchers to work together to take the necessary steps to invest time in putting together an eligible project proposal.

- **The EIP-AGRI helps to share lessons across borders**

The EIP-AGRI's pan-European approach and its ability to share lessons and form partnerships across countries and regions are distinctive and important aspects of the initiative. At EU level, the EIP network facilitates the exchange of expertise and good practices.

Recommendations to improve EIP-AGRI

The key conclusions above make the case that the EIP-AGRI has got off to a good start. But the EIP-AGRI **does signify a major change in how agricultural innovation and knowledge management is organised** both at EU level and in most Member States. Unsurprisingly, this raises some challenges which need to be addressed to optimise its delivery and future success. The study made recommendations for how to overcome these knowledge flow challenges.

- **Improve multiplication to maximise effectiveness**

For the success of EIP-AGRI, the dissemination of Operational Group results and their wider application on farms is vital. But in many of the Member States and regions, structures to enable connections and the dissemination of innovation between the regional, national and EU levels are not yet sufficiently developed.

The study recommends investing to scale up the EIP website as the volume of information available via the EIP-AGRI increases. At RDP level, Member States and regions should include so-called '**multipliers**' (such as **farm advisory services**) in **Operational Groups** who could help the project by bringing in their broad

practical knowledge and experience. At the same time, they spread the word on the work being done and speed up innovation, thanks to their connections to other farmers, foresters and other stakeholders.

- **Simplify systems and improve support**

Making EIP-AGRI easier to engage with will allow farmers, foresters, and SMEs to focus on innovation and build new connections. Possible ways to do this includes **ensuring applicants for EIP-AGRI funding can develop effective projects as quickly and simply as possible**. The study recommends that Member States and regions who do not already provide support through third party brokering and facilitation should consider doing so. Providing this support is likely to improve participation in Operational Groups as well as improving application and project quality. The **lack of advance funding**, however, will also need to be solved to further incentivise bottom-up Operational Groups.

- **Add value by incentivising multi-region Operational Groups**

At EU level, ensuring that administrative systems not only allow but incentivise Operational Groups to operate across the borders of more than one RDP would bring additional EU added value.

Legislation should foresee cross-border Operational Groups.

- **Build an EU-wide agricultural knowledge and innovation system**

By reducing fragmentation and improving knowledge flows, the EIP-AGRI provides a crucial opportunity to build coherent national / regional agricultural knowledge and innovation systems (AKISs). It will also be important to **build an integrated EU wide AKIS which interlinks these AKISs at EU level**. Consideration should also be given to incentivising innovation-focused **farmer-to-farmer exchange** programmes between Member States / regions. By connecting them to EIP-AGRI activities, they would better serve the purpose of fuelling/speeding up innovation.



- **Organise synergies with Horizon 2020 innovation support to tackle practice needs**

The EIP-AGRI organises complementarity and synergies between projects at national /regional level and at EU level. With the launch of more Operational Groups across the different countries and regions in Europe, overlapping and **common needs from practice** which are tackled through several Operational Groups will become **more visible. Addressing such problems on an EU-wide scale** will help reduce costs and duplication. The Horizon 2020 funding for multi-actor projects linked to the EIP-AGRI is therefore key.

- **Links to and awareness of other funding**

In the longer term, as the EIP-AGRI grows and the Operational Group projects it supports conclude, there is a need to consider how groups of actors, who in many cases will have been brought together for the first time by the EIP-AGRI, can continue to work together to facilitate interactive innovation. Links to and awareness of potential 'follow up' funding, such as Horizon 2020, should be made more visible. This will help Operational Groups to develop their work further and to come up with new ideas for further collaboration to speed up innovation on a national and EU scale.

Want to know more?

For more information about the evaluation study, including an executive summary and the full report, visit DG AGRI's evaluation site at: http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/evaluation/index_en.htm

Further information about the EIP-AGRI is available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/en>