

Report of the meeting on
The role of Thematic Networks in EU Agricultural Innovation
On Friday 3/2/2017, 10.00-13.00
In Main meeting room, Copa-Cogeca building, Trierstraat 61, 1040 Brussels, Belgium

Please use this report to sharpen your vision and understanding on the role TNs played until now, and as appetizer for the next meeting, beginning of 2017!

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1 Introduction

In 2015 the first Horizon 2020 Thematic Networks (TNs) in EIP-Agri (European Innovation Partnership on sustainable and productive agriculture) have been started. They play a key role in the EIP concept consisting of Focus Groups (FG), compiling the insights of stakeholders in specific subjects that are of interest for the agricultural network in Europe; Operational Groups (OG), bringing forward the practical innovations in specific regions and funded under the second pillar of the CAP; H2020 Multi-Actor Approach Research projects (MAA), bringing together scientists and practitioners around a specific research challenge ;and H2020 Thematic Networks (TN), deepening insights and creating links between Operational Groups and other stakeholders.

Key in these EIP related projects and groups is the Multi Actor Approach (MAA): where in previous programmes research, business and society had their exclusive domains, in EIP-AGRI farmers, advisors, researchers, suppliers, processors, agencies and other actors co-operate and co-innovate. The workshop is an answer to the question to have more information on advancement after the start of these networks.

The Chairman and DG Agri gave an overview of the first steps to realise EIP and expressed the relevance of combining different stakeholders in TN's.

Four exemplary Thematic Networks gave short presentations with: Overview, Progress to date, Challenges, lessons learnt, solutions, measures to increase impact; link with OG's and FG's.

These networks give an interesting overview of subjects and stages in development in the groups.

To warm up discussion, a vision on development was given by David Gardner (innovation for Agriculture, UK): "To turn knowledge and information into real innovation in practice, Agricultural Knowledge Information and Innovation System (AKIS) Failings in UK. Plead for a coherent, functional and funded AKIS".

In interactive sessions for 6 networks was reflected on the questions: "How can Thematic Networks interact better with farmers and speed up innovation?" and "How can Thematic Networks work together and engage with other projects?" The meeting ended with a panel session and feedback form workshop sessions

Involvement of Copa-Cogeca

*In Thematic Networks, farmers' organisations are involved and create a link to farmers they work for, and the networks they work with. Copa-Cogeca now supports the execution, mostly via its members. For this overarching activity it was a natural role for Copa-Cogeca to host and chair the meeting. Chairperson **Kjell Ivarsson** expressed that it was a good experience to see the results of the EIP-AGRI after Copa-Cogeca support at the start.*

Supporting role of DG Agri-Unit B2 – R&I

Alberto d'Avino congratulates the organisers for the initiative. The EC is delighted to see that actors and stakeholders are actively mobilised around new EC funding tools and new project paradigms. .

Inge van Oost introduced the EU agricultural innovation landscape:

-Multi-actor approach in the H2020 2014-2020 programme, H2020 Thematic Networks (TN), EIP Agri Operational Groups (OG); EIP Agri Network Focus Groups (FG);

-Link to national and regional structures in agricultural education, research and advisory

-Ambitions for the next programme period.

2 Progress in development of the EIP-AGRI

Inge Van Oost – DG Agriculture and Rural Development, Unit Research and Innovation

The EIP Agri is a new development in EU policy. The Europe 2020 Flagship Initiative 'Innovation Union' specified European Innovation Partnerships (EIPs) in 2010 as a new tool for speeding up innovation by using and interlinking existing policies and instruments. The aim of the EIP "Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability" (EIP-AGRI), launched in 2012, is to foster competitive and sustainable farming and forestry that 'achieves more and better from less'. The EIP-AGRI helps to ensure a steady supply of food, feed and biomaterials, in harmony with the essential natural resources on which we depend and with a dedicated attention to include the relevant actors in the chain.

To enable impact from projects, the basic concept of the EIP-AGRI is (1) to focus on end-users' problems/opportunities and (2) to have partners with complementary types of knowledge – scientific, practical and other – joining forces in project activities from the beginning till the end. This is called the "interactive innovation model" and is essential to tackle current complex challenges with good results. Woodrow Wilson, an American president, said "we need all the brains we can get". The EIP-AGRI approach was developed based on Member States good examples with support of the SCAR-AKIS Strategic Working Group.

The EIP-AGRI applies this interactive innovation principle under EU research funding (the so-called 'multi-actor approach': 500 mio Euro in the first four H2020 years) and under CAP funding for Rural Development (the so-called 'EIP Operational Groups': 3200 groups planned in 2014-2020). These interactive projects are able to develop innovative solutions which cover real needs and are more likely to be applied in practice. Moreover, end-users like farmers, foresters or businesses will be more motivated to use the project results, because they were involved in generating them and feel "co-ownership".

Having potential innovative knowledge is one thing, turning it into reality is another. "In the end, the value of an idea lies in the using of it", said Thomas Alva Edison, the inventor of the light bulb.

Besides the interactive innovation projects under the 2 policies, the EIP-AGRI also supports the EIP network which connects people and projects, both at EU level and at national/regional level. This creates great spill-over effects through knowledge sharing and cross-fertilisation of ideas. The EIP-AGRI's slogan is "ideas, put into practice, with success".

Involvement of the SWG SCAR-AKIS

The SWG (Strategic Working Group) of the SCAR (Standing Committee for Agricultural Research) on AKIS (Agriculture Knowledge and Innovation Systems) is a think tank focusing on all knowledge and innovation systems in the Bioeconomy, that stimulate research, knowledge generation and knowledge exchange, and innovation across the agri-food and biomass chains, from producer to consumer. The previous works of this group generate the key concepts/project paradigms underlying the EIP-AGRI.

Adrien Guichaoua, co-chair of the group provided support for the organisation of the meeting

3 Report on Networks' presentations and workshops

To give the attendees a balanced overview of the progress at different stages in different types of TN's, following examples were presented:

- **Agrispin**, from the 1st TN call (2014) and active for 1¾ years with a general focus: describe best practices establish a network and give recommendations on effective innovation support;
- **4D4F** and **SmartAKIS**, 2nd call (2015) and active for 1 year with specific focus: determine Best Practices, Standard Operational Procedures and establish special interest groups and communities of practice on datamanagement in dairy, respectively in smart farming.
- **SKIN** is from the 3rd TN call (2016) and shows the results of the process of development with a variety of actors of a project focussed on Short Supply Chains, with direct relations between famers and consumers.
- **OK-net-Arable** from the 1st TN call (2014) and active for 1¾ years with a general focus on best practices and efficient knowledge exchange in organic arable production.

3.1 Workshop 1: Smart Farming

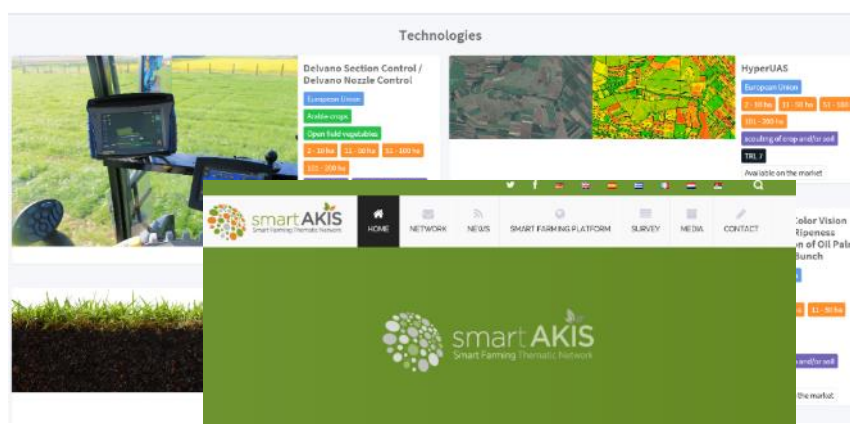
Spyros Fountas, Agricultural University of Athens; Ulrich Adam, CEMA

3.1.1 Network outlines: Smart AKIS (www.smart-akis.com)

Smart AKIS is the Smart Farming Network, an EU partnership of 12 organizations representing academia, industry, agricultural advisory services and the farmer community. Our aims are to extend the use of Smart Farming among EU farmers and to bridge the gap between practitioners, industry and research on the delivery of Smart Farming solutions fit to farmers' needs.

To that end, Smart AKIS develops an online *smart farming platform* with a searchable database of the most suitable Smart Farming solutions from the large stock of research results and commercial applications in EU.

The network promotes multi-actor *innovation workshops* in 7 countries for the market uptake and development of innovative smart farming solutions and contributes with *policy recommendations* for bringing up Smart Farming in the EU agenda and for overcoming the obstacles faced by farmers in Smart Farming adoption.



Development proceeds in 6 lines:

The Smart Farming Platform launched in February 2017 is an open and free searchable database with more than 1.000 Smart Farming solutions fed by the Network partners and by the providers of such solutions with CEMA (European Agricultural Machinery) support. In parallel, Smart AKIS has conducted a research on the interests and needs on regards to smart farming of 271 farmers interviewed in France, Germany, Greece, Netherlands, Serbia, Spain and UK. Findings from survey have allowed organising starting on March 2017, of 7 Innovation Workshops in such countries bringing together farmers, research, innovation brokers and industry for the market uptake, transfer or development of new smart farming solutions.

Smart AKIS [presentation](#); Smart AKIS website: www.smart-akis.com



3.1.2 Viewpoints from the interactive session

The session gave interesting viewpoints on the 2 central questions of the workshop:

How can Thematic Networks interact better with farmers and speed up innovation?

- Hold regional workshops to involve farmers
- Find out about farmers' needs
- Identify successful business models
- Address downscaling
- Peer-to-peer approach: farmers training farmers
- Farmers co-creating
- Renting/sharing models
- Scenario-based discussions: where to go in the next years? Concrete, easy-to-understand language
- Make farmers part of the WHOLE innovation process, involve farmers already during the conceptualisation phase of projects
- Translating science into practical information (Webportal)
- Use agricultural press/journalists more (not just social media!)
- Early adopters informing their neighbours (innovation ambassadors)
- Ensure continued life/presence of the platform
- Farmer associations as intermediaries
- Young farmers to be targeted/involved more (agriculture colleges, contractor schools, games as tools)

How should Thematic Networks work together and engage with other projects?

- Link Thematic Networks to Operational Groups (OGs) – use national EIP Contact Points
- Use Rural Development Programmes to identify relevant OGs
- Aren't there maybe too many platforms already? Platform landscape too complex?
- Innovation brokers & advisory services to ensure greater integration
- Tailor more to first-entry-points used by farmers
- Link to regional government initiatives
- Link to other TNs (integrate results, joint workshops)
- Events like today's
- Look beyond agriculture
- Private extension services

3.2 Workshop 2: Innovation Support

Eelke Wielinga, ZLTO / Link Consult;

Ilse Geyskens, Innovatie Steun Punt Boerenbond;

Michael Kuegler, LandWirtschaftskammern

3.2.1 Network outlines: AgriSpin:

AgriSpin aims to create more space for innovations, through amplifying *good examples of innovation support systems* and through multi-actor learning about ways to stimulate innovation and remove obstacles. The main target group is intermediaries who connect initiators to other actors for involving them in creating innovations, such as farmers, knowledge workers, actors in the value chain, administrators, civil society groups, etc...

11 European project partners are playing this intermediate role in their regional AKIS. 4 scientific partners complete the team.

Each regional partner hosted a *Cross Visit*. The visiting team, composed of project partners, studied interesting cases of agricultural innovations. The scientists provide sound *methodology* for making these visits valuable. Partners inspire each other and initiate improvements in their own innovation support systems.

The project also addresses the institutional environment, involving public managers, administrators and policy makers.

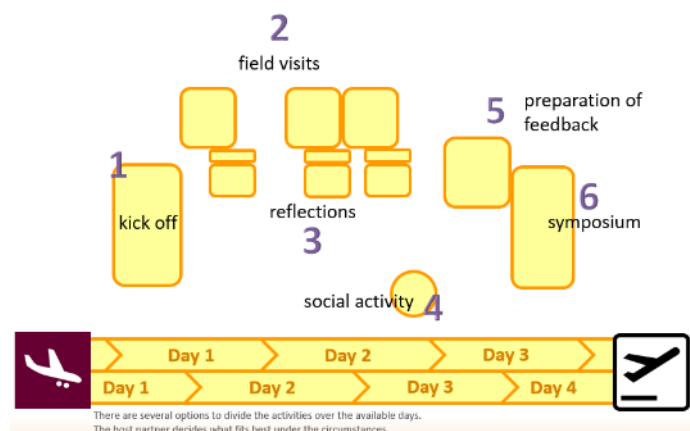
Case studies and lessons learned are made available to a wider public.

The scientists explore *lessons to be generalised* and added to the scientific discourse on innovation brokers.

Now that Cross Visit method has been well tested and the professional network is functional, the project is ready for collaboration with other partners such as thematic networks and operational groups under the EIP as well as other interested regions in joint learning about innovation support systems.

From the vast amount of information from 57 visited cases, some general lines in the development of innovations were seen by the network partners. They translated them to recommendations, on which they are eager to get your comments!

Site: www.agrispin.eu

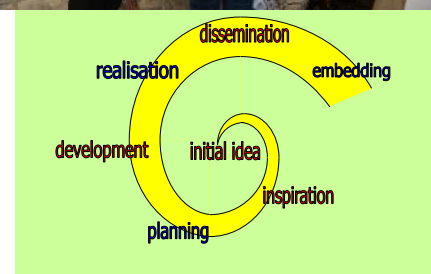


3.2.2 Recommendations From Agrispin

Based on shared insights, the following recommendations are formulated during many sessions:

How can Innovation support interact better with farmers and speed up innovation?

- Innovation support should nurture dedicated persons and their ideas.
- Innovation support services are key actors in creating pathways for co-creative and co-creating innovation processes. Their position in the AKIS deserves more recognition.
- Time for reflection within innovation support agencies on their own role and strategies is important, but it needs to be put on the agenda, because it tends to be forgotten.
- Support agencies should identify different stages in innovation processes, and develop a range of strategies and services which might be different for each stage. The Spiral of Innovations is a helpful tool for doing so.
- The connecting role of support agents in innovation processes deserves more recognition.
- It is helpful to refer to "Multi Actor Approach" to give legitimacy to this role, and to create space for such agents within their task descriptions that allows them to do what appears necessary in the situation.
- If authorities wish to stimulate innovations, they should lower the threshold for actors with initiatives for novel ideas to get access to funds.
- The Operational Group approach should be more widely used in innovation support.
- Targeting specific categories of actors, such as young farmers and other high potentials is a useful strategy.
- Innovation support agencies should systematically investigate reasons for lack of engagement of entrepreneurs.
- The perfect innovation support approach that fits all circumstances does not exist. Criteria or checklists for organisations that offer such services are of limited use.
- Never waste a good crisis. As crisis is often the driver for innovation processes, recognising tensions in the system and creating awareness about the need for change are



important elements for innovation support services to take into account.

How should Thematic Networks work together and engage with other projects?

- The cross visit methodology is a good way to stimulate such reflections between professionals with similar tasks in different environments.
- To operationalize the requirements on Multi Actor Approach, as clearly defined in H2020 work programme, the tools commonly used for project management are insufficient. Additional language and tools are needed. This should to get attention in activities for training, reflection and monitoring.
- For supporting groups of different actors who work together on an innovation (Operational Groups), project management skills are not sufficient. There is a need for training and guidance of professionals who facilitate such groups.

3.3 Workshop 3: Dairy Management

Richard Lloyd, *Innovation for Agriculture*;
Stephanie Van Weyenberg, *ILVO*

3.3.1 Network outlines: 4D4F

4D4F (**D**ata **D**riven **D**airy **D**ecisions for **F**armers) is creating a network on the use of new sensor technologies and their role in creating data that will produce better decisions on dairy farms.

We are a partnership of 16 organisations from 9 countries.

The network aims to *increase the uptake of data from sensors* on dairy farms and encourage further innovations by the research community, farmers and commercial companies'



4D4F will create a *Community of Practice* to exchange innovations from both science and practice on how to use data from sensors to inform dairy decision making.

4D4F is also promoting a number of *Standard Operation Procedures* and *Best Practice guides* to help farmers use these technologies effectively.

The network aims to *increase the uptake of data from sensors* on dairy farms and encourage further innovations by the research community, farmers and commercial companies'

One of the results of 4D4F is a best practice guide on Reproduction, a main issue in sustainable dairy management. The guide gives experience from practice and suggestions how to consider use of sensors. Like other material, 4D4F spreads the information through its network.

Site: www.4d4f.eu

3.3.2 Outcomes of the interactive session

The interactive session say 3 lines of answers on the first question in the workshop:

How can Thematic Networks interact better with farmers and speed up innovation?

Attract Farmers

4D4F
The Best Dairy Decision

Best Practice Guide on Reproduction
and the use of technology to improve fertility

Author: Richard Lloyd, Innovation for Agriculture, UK
Last updated: May 23rd, 2017

Fertility

2015 saw Dairy farming incomes reduced to below costs. While markets are starting to recover, for many, the long-term answer to making their dairy enterprise sustainable, is to increase yields and herd size at the same time as reducing labour costs. Reducing labour on family farms just leads to a longer working day. So what is the impact on fertility?

Higher yields create more nutritional challenges in early lactation and can lead to lower conception rates. It is also well established that higher yielding cows have shorter, and less intense heats that are harder to spot by traditional methods. Inconveniently these also mainly occur at night. The traditional way of detecting heat involves observations of at least 3 sessions of 20 minutes. This is often shortened when a farm has less than the ideal amount of labour, and is less likely to happen at the optimum time – at night.

Traditionally herd fertility has been measured by calving interval. However, this is a historical figure which does not give real time information about what is happening today. Therefore, the preferred key performance indicator (KPI) is **Pregnancy Rate (PR)** and is defined as the percentage of cows eligible to become pregnant that actually do become pregnant in a given period.

Eligible cows would consist of non-pregnant cows that have passed the farm's voluntary waiting period, and are not on the cull list. In this guide pregnancy rates will be quoted over a 21 day period.

PR is the product of Submission Rate (SR) and Conception Rate (CR)

More information on fertility KPIs is detailed in the fertility Key Performance Indicator glossary

Table 1: 2015 UK HolsteinFriesian Average KPIs

	Average	Top 25%	Top 5%
CR	32%	36%	50%
SR	33%	41%	58%
PR	11%	15%	22%

Source: NMR selected data

Table 2: UK Trends in KPIs 2010-2015

Year of Study	Average 2010	Average 2015	Top 25% 2010	Top 25% 2015
CR	32%	32%	40%	36%
SR	27%	33%	37%	41%
PR	9%	11%	13%	15%
Calving Interval	624	412	460	396

Source: NMR selected data

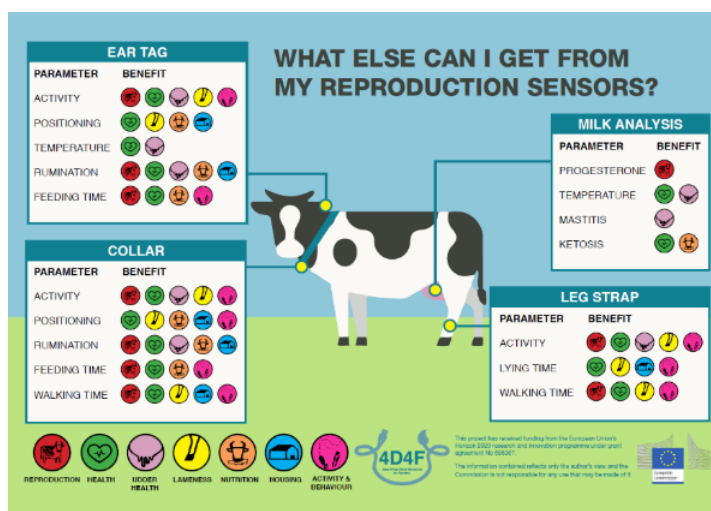
- Need inspiring content on the website before widespread promotion to farmers
- Use media – including Social Media, Regional farming magazines
- Use organisations close to farmers
- Connect project website to regional websites

Inspire Farmers

- Quality informative material on the website written in terms that farmers understand
- Translated wherever possible into their native language
- Give trusted independent information.
- Make use of and support early technology adopters
- Include case studies which farmers can relate to
- Demonstrate best practice (and feed into practice abstracts)

Speed up Innovation

- Use multi actor themed community to stimulate new operational groups
- Rural development networks should communicate with thematic networks about potential gaps



3.4 Workshop 4: Short Chains

Sara Djelveh, University of Foggia;

Martin Collison, Collison Associates & Innovation for Agriculture

3.4.1 Network outline: SKIN

SKIN is an ambitious initiative of 20 partners in 14 countries in the area of Short Food Supply Chains (SFSCs). It intends to systematise and bring knowledge to practitioners, promote collaboration within demand-driven innovation logic and provide inputs to policymaking through links to the EIP-AGRI.

SKIN will build and animate a *community* of about 500 stakeholders working for the improvement of SFSCs efficiency and for the benefit of stakeholders and growth in the sector. The community will be built and animated around the identification of *good practices* in short supply chains across Europe. Partners will scout, analyse and classify a significant number of cases in different countries.

"*Good practices*" will be systematised, processed into highly usable formats (including video and page-flows) and made accessible to stakeholders via the web (following the EIP AGRI formats) and through the set-up of regional nodes, to allow a deeper penetration of existing knowledge into practice.

The work on good practices will also allow identifying *key issues* (hindrances or opportunities) around SFSCs. Such issues will be the main themes of 6 "*innovation challenges workshops*" the purpose of which is to stimulate stakeholders to propose new ideas for innovation based research or innovation uptake. These will be supported in a coaching phase where consortium partners deliver guidance to stakeholders for the full development of those innovative ideas.

SKIN puts significant efforts into *dissemination*, to reach as many stakeholders as possible, and exploitation, to plan post projects developments in the form of a *permanent association* that would give continuity to the activities launched with the project (community expansion, circulation of good practices, promotion of research based innovation and linkages with the EIP and policy making instances).

Building up a Thematic Network is a great challenge. One of the decisive factors is people who are able to get the essence in a message, linked to practice and state of the play insights. Several partners in the SKIN Network are working further on the cooperation they started in the EIP Focus Group on Innovative Short Food Supply Chain management.

Presentation: <https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B1j0RgUd60KESERTNW5nU2ZkaWc>

Site: <http://www.shortfoodchain.eu/>

3.4.2 Outcomes of the interactive session

The SKIN project (Short food supply chains Knowledge and Innovation Network, H2020 Grant Agreement n°728055) started in November 2016. Co-organizing this workshop has been an outstanding opportunity for the consortium to continue reflecting and inquiring on the two workshop's central questions, which had been already addressed in the framework of the SKIN kick-off meeting, held in Foggia on the 14th-15th of December 2016.

As presented in Brussels during the SKIN pitch presentation, the SKIN consortium has validated and agreed to use a participatory method all along the project meetings for implementing a real and effective multi-actor approach in the project coordination and implementation. This participatory approach is basically realized through the organization of participatory workshops, facilitated by the consortium's tasks and WPs leaders during the project official meetings. The discussions held in Brussels during this interactive workshop session therefore allowed an improved understanding of the SKIN challenges, thus basically feeding the discussions started at the very beginning of the project implementation.

Specifically, the first central question addressed through this workshop, "**How can Thematic Networks interact better with farmers and speed up innovation?**", has contributed to deepen the framework for the SKIN *engagement strategy* and the related *learning methods*. Those are two keystones of the SKIN methodology and approach, since they aim at aggregating around the SKIN project a large and representative, multi-party community of stakeholders from as many countries and regions as possible in the EU and associated countries, using common and shared methods for guiding the interactions and the knowledge sharing activities (learning, brokering, coaching), thus maximising the reach and impact of the project¹.

During the project's proposal preparation, the SKIN consortium had identified four categories of actors to be involved in this thematic network's activities in order to consider the role and perspectives of different players and thus involving them. To this extent, SKIN considers short supply chain in a comprehensive manner, valuing also the role of actors not directly involved in production. These may be part of the social or institutional setting, or economic actors indirectly concerned by short supply chains, as represented by the following diagram.

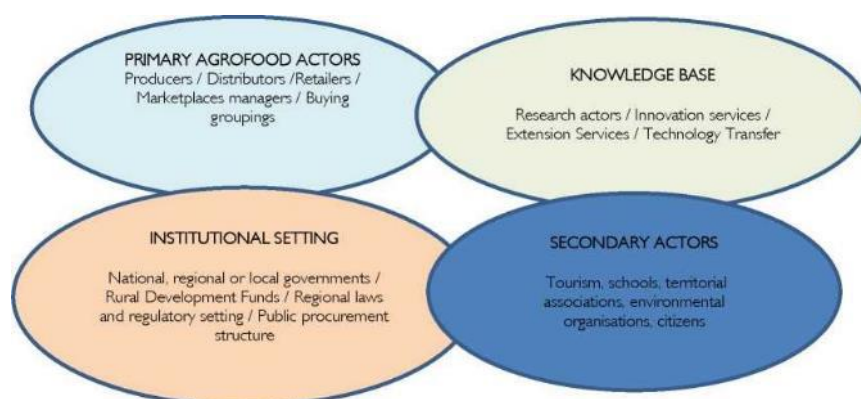


Figure 1: typologies of actors and stakeholders in the SKIN proposal

Furthermore, drawing from one of the workshops convened at the SKIN kick-off meeting in December 2016, the SKIN consortium has identified the following groups of actors/stakeholders who impact significantly on SFSCs:

¹ For a comprehensive view on the SKIN methodology, learning methods and engagement strategy, please visit the [SKIN website](#) and download the reports "[D4.3 Guidelines for learning and brokering activities](#)" and "[D4.4 Stakeholders engagement guidelines](#)"

1. **Companies who work along the SFC chain** and who can demonstrate innovative and successful business models for SFCs:

- Food & drink producers / farmers
- Food & drink processors
- Logistics
- Retail
- Restaurants, catering, out of home

2. **Multipliers and advisors** who can access large numbers of farmers and food chain companies to disseminate the innovation and best practice collected by SKIN:

- Agrifood & business associations and cooperatives
- Chambers of Commerce/Agriculture
- Extension, advisory and innovation services including business advisors, accountants etc.
- Media and opinion formers
- LAGs

3. **Funding bodies and banks** who can provide the finance needed to support SFCs – these funding partners need case studies to give them confidence in SFCs, so that they support them effectively with the investment capital needed, from Banks, Commercial funding and Regional, national and EU funding bodies

4. **(Young) innovators** who often come into the sector after studying or working in other places, whether by joining existing companies, family businesses or as entrepreneurs in their own right. The energy, new ideas and enthusiasm they bring needs to be supported and SKIN should seek to identify the innovation they generate and promote this to others; these are amongst the companies who work along the food chain (see 1st).

5. **Policy makers** to ensure that the policy and regulatory frameworks in which farmers and food companies work support the development of SFCs:

6. **Public authorities** (*local, regional, national, EU*)

Farmers are thereby at the core of the SKIN engagement strategy and the effectiveness of their involvement within the project activities will be crucial in order to achieve the SKIN objectives and strengthen the European community of Short Food Supply Chains.

The discussions carried out in this workshop session have confirmed that reaching most farmers will be challenging unless an effective strategy is planned and implemented. Established networks, as well as already running events, meetings and gatherings will be crucial if we want to proactively engage farmers in the SKIN community and contribute to speeding-up the innovation processes in the SFSCs model. It will therefore be easier to attract farmers and food producers if the network builds on established meetings, events and gatherings and, especially, trusted intermediaries, like: Co-operatives, Farmer organisations, Supply chains which farmers supply and Innovation support services.

This recalls to the importance of trustful and transparent relationships in food chains and links to the concept of “*organized proximity*”. Organized proximity relates to decreasing the distance between actors, irrespective of the geographical distance (Torre, 2010), and is based on the logics of:

- Membership: the feeling of belonging to the same network or club,
- Similitude: the fact of recognizing oneself in a common vision, sharing values such as a certain idea of quality of life and agricultural products.

The networks have an important role also in helping universities and research centres to reach end users and have impact, thus reducing the pressure on researchers and securing the actual impact of the research activities. For securing such impact, in particular, it will be crucial to raise the farmers’ interest and attention: in communicating any innovation it is therefore very important to explain its commercial value to farmers, using with case studies, business impact assessments, and concrete examples.

Not surprising, the role and valorisation of established networks has been identified as crucial for reaching the SKIN objectives: this also includes the relationships with other relevant initiatives, such as other Thematic Networks (TN) and projects, and thus leads to the workshop second central question: ***How should Thematic Networks work together and engage with other projects?***

To this extent, the discussions carried out during the workshop has highlighted that TNs share some common activities and, thus, problems. Interacting all along our projects will be useful to boost the TNs activities and scope. Among the different possible options for organizing such cross-fertilization and exchange of ideas and knowledge among the existing (and future) TNs, we have identified some that might be particularly helpful to this scope, such as:

- Inviting other TNs to organized events (such as workshops, field visits, conferences, meetings, etc.);
- Sharing social media and dissemination strategies (e.g. link in the website);
- Brainstorming on some activities, such as for instance on the database(s) of good practices to be shared.

As about the latter, this point has also been raised during the “H2020 Coordinators Day for SC2 proposals funded in 2016” held in Brussels on the 22nd of June 2017². At this venue, the coordinators of the 2016-funded Thematic Networks and the European Commission representatives have discussed the costs and effort needed for realizing, monitoring and populating such databases.

Another important issue pointed out during this meeting relates to the connection between the different TNs websites, platforms and databases and the comprehensive database realized by the EIP-AGRI service point, which should include all the good practices and innovation collected by the networks. Simplifying and easing the access to the information and knowledge generated by the TNs activities appear to be one of the crucial points for maintaining the future sustainability of such initiatives, as well as for reinforcing, strengthening and structuring the communication among those.

Other points raised during this workshop’s interactive session relates to the importance of balancing European, national and regional activities. Networks must respect regional differences and not try to force all regions to adopt the same ideas. At the same time they have a key role in moving ideas from one region or country to other areas, which may be able to benefit from them. Also, in this case, it will be crucial to mobilize established networks and to keep these networks active. In particular, it is critical to link the European Thematic Networks activities to those of the EIP-AGRI Operational Groups (OG). Many OGs are now established across European Member States and they can provide a direct link to regional and national work and multi-actor groups. In addition, it would be helpful to link to Leader groups and other national/regional Rural Development Programmes (RDP) funding in order to facilitate farmers who are keen on adopting new innovations accessing RDP support to do so.

Finally, apart from the two central questions in the workshop, the workshop’s participants have given specific attention to short chains and, in particular, to specific issues in Short Food Chains organizational model(s) and actors and the need to address links to other projects. This issue has been addressed by the SKIN project since its very beginning: drawing on the SKIN proposal, we have identified several past and on-going projects for the SKIN community to be linked with. Such list of initiatives, even if not exhaustive, is included in the SKIN proposal and is summarized in the table below.

Table 1: Contribution of on-going projects to SKIN needs

² All projects funded in 2016 under the Societal Challenge n°2 (SC2) of H2020 have been invited by this workshop organized in Brussels by the Research Executive Agency (REA) of the European Commission.

NEED	CONTRIBUTION OF PAST AND ON-GOING PROJECTS
Business development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AgriSpin [Innovatiesteunpunt, SEGES and Teagasc] – H2020
Distribution and chain integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PURE hubs [Innovatiesteunpunt and ZLTO] – ERDF INTERREG • Fish&Chips [Innovatiesteunpunt] – ERDF INTERREG
Logistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Landwinkel cooperative [ZLTO] - RDP • Kempen Lamb Brand [ZLTO] - ERDF INTERREG • TrueFood [Confagricoltura, UGent, Campden BRI] – FP7
Production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • REPLACE [CLS] – FP7 • BaSeFood [CLS] – FP7
Regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FOODCOMM [Teagasc] – FP6 • SOLINSA [CERSHAS] – FP7 • CapinFood [UGent, Campden BRI, CLS] – FP7
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SOLINSA [CERSHAS] – FP7
Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Landwinkel Cooperative [ZLTO] - RDP • GROEI.kans [Innovatiesteunpunt and ZLTO] – ERDF INTERREG • SOLINSA [CERSHAS] – FP7
Consumption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CapinFood [UGent, Campden BRI, CLS] – FP7 • FoodWard [CLS] – Erasmus+ • TrueFood [Confagricoltura, UGent, Campden BRI] – FP7 • SUSTAGRI [UNIFG] – Erasmus+
New technologies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FRACTALS [BioSense] – FP7

Connections with such projects and initiatives should apply at different scales: from the regional, to the national one, till the European level.

As about the latter, the workshop's discussions have confirmed the importance of the background provided by the EIP-AGRI activities and, particularly referring to the SKIN framework, as for the EIP-AGRI Focus Group on Short Supply Chains Management. To this extent, a strong connection between SKIN and the EIP-AGRI is ensured by the participation within the consortium of five experts actively involved in three focus groups within the EIP, of which four SKIN partners worked within the EIP Focus Group on Short Supply Chains Management, as summarized in the table below.

Table 2: SKIN consortium connection with EIP-AGRI

Partner	Expert	Focus Group(s)
Collison & Associates (UK)	Martin Collison	Short Supply Chains Management & Water and Agriculture: adaptive strategies at farm level
Agrarprojektverein (AT)	Christian Jochum	Short Supply Chains Management
ZLTO (NL)	Marjon Krol	Short Supply Chains Management
Innovatiesteunpunt (BE)	Patrick Pasgang	Short Supply Chains Management
TEAGASC (IE)	Aine Macken-Walsh	High Nature Value farming

SKIN thereby qualifies itself as a network built upon the experience of the EIP-AGRI and that will work to reinforce those connections.

In addition, other relevant initiatives and connections that have emerged from the discussions carried out at the workshop are:

- The [SALT project](#) (*Systemes Alimentaires Territorialisés*), which has been developed by the French CIVAM of Brittany Region with the aim of evaluating both the social and economic impacts of Short Food Supply Chains³.
- The AGROPOL pilot project, which aims at developing a European cross-border agribusiness model region⁴.

³ The report on the SALT method is available at the following [link](#).

⁴ Information about this pilot initiative is available at the following [link](#).

- The report “Short Food Supply Chains and Local Food Systems in the EU. A State of Play of their Socio - Economic Characteristics” published in 2013⁵ by the Joint Research Centre with the collaboration, among others, of Professor Moya Kneafsey (Coventry University).
- It would be also useful to link to the EU plant and animal genetic resources programmes which are targeting the conservation of genetic diversity as it is critical that minority breeds and varieties have a commercial market so they are sustained in the long term.
- DG REGIO of the European Commission is very interested in using food chain development and consumer engagement as a development tool and would be interested in the link to SKIN.
- The forthcoming Food 2030 strategy, recently launched by the DG Research and Innovation (DG RTD) of the European Commission in order to strengthen Research and Innovation for Food and Nutrition Security.

In particular, as about the latter, SKIN should also work for providing insights on innovation and research in Short Food Chains as concrete examples of innovative approaches for the development of sustainable food systems. As discussed during the workshop, in fact, there are a set of limits and bottlenecks hindering the development of Short Food Chains in Europe and SKIN should be able to address such challenges, supporting and strengthening the innovation capacities of the actors operating in SFSCs. For instance, many farmers have a poor understanding of the consumer and food markets, so SKIN should seek to bridge this gap and improve their understanding of the markets’ features and dynamics in order to help them identifying the right market(s) in which to compete and the way of doing this. To this extent, SKIN would need to support producers with Protected Designation of Origin (PDOs) and Protected Geographical Indication (PGIs) status. Collaborations with the industry as well as with the distribution channels (including Large Scale Distribution) shouldn’t be underestimated neither: as pointed out during the workshop, in fact, supermarket supply chains can be short if they work closely with farmers or primary food producers, deliver improved traceability and return more value to farmers and food producers.

Finally, drawing from the outcomes of this workshop’s session, as well as from the previous and subsequent discussions and meetings undertaken in the framework of the SKIN project, the SKIN consortium has taken some concrete actions for addressing the main points and issues raised and improving the effectiveness of the project strategy, as summarized in the table below.

Workshop’s related contents	Topic	SKIN strategy
1st workshop question: <i>How can Thematic Networks interact better with farmers and speed up innovation?</i>	Using established trusted intermediaries	This need is already addressed by the SKIN consortium composition, which is built in a multi-actor logic and includes not only research centres, but also farmers’ organizations and innovation-support organizations.
	Linking with established meeting and events	The next SKIN workshop will be organized alongside other initiatives (events, fairs, etc.) with the aim of maximising the impact of the exchange.
	Showing the commercial value of the innovation to farmers	During the 2 nd and 3 rd year of implementation, SKIN will organize a set of coaching and brokering activities for farmers and other SFSCs stakeholders. Such activities will be coordinated by EFB partner, a small private company specialized in business models and market uptakes.
2nd workshop question: <i>How should Thematic Networks work together and engage with other projects?</i>	Linking with other Thematic Networks and initiatives	The SKIN consortium, apart from co-organizing the interactive meeting which is the object of the present report, is actively participating at the development and realization of new Thematic Networks. One of the outcomes of such activity has been the submission in February 2017 of a new proposal for a Thematic Network focusing on biomass valorisation. The project ENABLING has been selected for funding and will benefit from the participation of six partners already involved in the SKIN project.
	Common ICT tools for facilitating the knowledge exchange	The SKIN website and platform is now online and it is going to represent the main reservoir of available knowledge and information about Short Food Chains in Europe. The SKIN dissemination strategy also includes a well-defined social media strategy. For more information: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow @shortfoodchain • Use #agrifoodcommunity

⁵ The complete JRC report is available at the following [link](#).

3.5 Workshop 5: Knowledge Transfer

David Gardner, Innovation for Agriculture

3.5.1 Inspiration from: Innovation for Agriculture

Innovation for Agriculture (IfA) is a consortium of 15 English Agricultural Societies.

Through the creation of technical centres around England, IfA delivers new science and innovation to farmers via its website, publications, conferences, seminars, workshops, on farm demonstrations and new media. Through the strong consortium of Agricultural Societies, the initiative is prioritising in: Precision Livestock and Animal Health and Welfare; Soil and Water; Renewable Energy; The Uplands

David Gardner is Farm Manager in Dairy, Cereals, Fruit, Potatoes and Vegetables, Sheep and Beef; a Nuffield scholar, an employee of the Royal Agricultural Society of England and the founder of Innovation for Agriculture. This extensive experience is good basis for discussion.

3.5.2 Outcomes of the interactive session

The presentation challenged the audience to come with suggestions from their experience

How can Thematic Networks interact better with farmers and speed up innovation?

- We should stress KE not KT
- Sweden pays farmers to attend EU events
- Local operational groups work well
- Language a double problem
 - - English to local
 - Scientist to farmers
- Many farmers don't speak English

How can Thematic Networks work together and engage with other projects?

- Funding instruments
 - Local stays local
 - Lack of cohesion in the system
 - National funding of OGs has been too slow
 - We need 'bridging' people
 - Knowledge about funding systems is key
 - Avoid double funding and duplication
 - Farmers like to share locally
 - Need to link local groups with networks and EU systems
 - Best German region has an innovation office
- Influence attitudes to change when people are young
- Find win, win, win – quantify and demonstrate the benefit
- Visit innovative projects
- Create social events around KE
- Retailers driving KE – UK ahead of others
- Researchers are seen as elitist by farmers

Specific issues associated with Knowledge Transfer

- Look outside agriculture for new ideas
- Diversification
 - Agri-tourism
 - Social farming
- Training of advisors – inc risk management



- Different agencies fund different parts of the chain – research agency and agricultural departments – doesn't work well
- Some public funding of advisors still exists – with a mix of private
- Specialised farms seek out knowledge
- Those who aren't dependent on agriculture don't bother
- Educated farmers seek out knowledge – those who have been to College/University
- Profitable farms have quicker succession.
- National trade drives a thirst for knowledge – eg Pigs in Denmark, Horticulture in Holland – have to compete in other markets. If the sector is important to the national economy it drives change and uptake of new ideas.
- We need networks across Europe – Hooray!!!!
- New entrants have issues – but I can't remember what they are!

3.6 Workshop 6: Knowledge Organic

Bram Moeskops, IFOAM

3.6.1 Network outline: OK-Net Arable

OK-Net Arable is a thematic network, coordinated by IFOAM EU and involves 17 partners from 12 countries all over Europe. OK-Net Arable started in March 2015 and will run until February 2018.

OK-Net Arable takes a very innovative approach in that in all stages of the project, farmers play a prominent role. Much more than being asked for advice, farmers contribute to a process of co-creation of knowledge throughout the project. This work is facilitated by the participation of 14 farmer innovation groups.

Knowledge exchange for better farming

The complexity of organic farming requires farmers to have a very high level of knowledge and skills. But exchange on organic farming techniques remains limited. OK-Net Arable promotes exchange of knowledge among farmers, farm advisers and scientists with the aim to increase productivity and quality in organic arable cropping all over Europe.

Despite substantial growth of organic farming in the EU over the last decade, concerns have been raised whether organic farming is productive enough compared to conventional farming. On the other hand, evidence shows that the more experienced an organic farmer is, the smaller the yield difference with conventional farms. Indeed, organic agriculture works as a complex system which requires a very high level of knowledge. By promoting co-creation and exchange of knowledge, the OK-Net Arable project therefore has significant potential to increase productivity and quality in organic farming.



The OK-Net Arable project has launched a platform <http://farmknowledge.org/> that aims filling the gap in the exchange of information between farmers across Europe. Farmers' needs were taken into account at every stage of development in order to make it easy for them to use. The platform is available in 10 languages (English, Bulgarian, Danish, Dutch, Estonian, French, German, Hungarian, Italian and Latvian) and the solutions are divided according to the most relevant topics in organic arable farming: Soil quality and fertility, nutrient management, pest and disease control, weed management and solutions for specific crops. Not only can farmers and advisors find solutions and engage with each other, they can also propose solutions.

Site: www.Ok-net-arable.eu

3.6.2 Outcomes from the interactive session

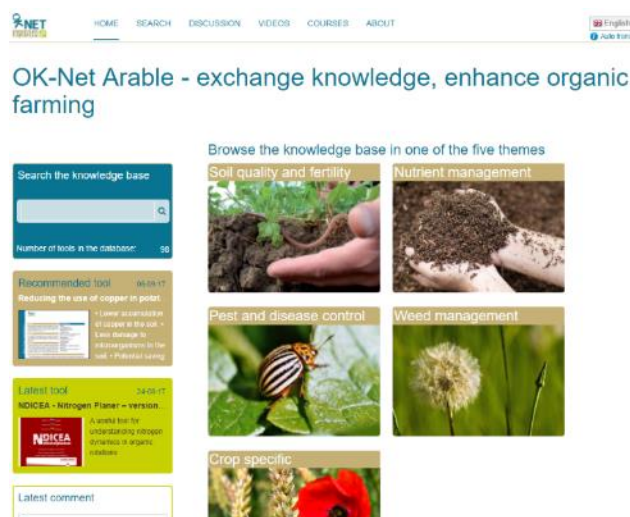
The interactive session gave valuable insights for the project:

The challenges for Thematic Networks to interact with farmers and speed up innovation

- Ask farmers' opinion, involve them in every stage. Co-decision requires shift in mind-set and flexibility. This also means that the "Description of Action" of Thematic Networks needs to be flexible. It should be easy to change plans, involve additional organisations or hire additional expertise if this turns out to be relevant during the course of the project.
- The way how farmers, farmer organisations and advisory systems are organised is very different from country to country. That makes it very difficult to involve all relevant players as full partners in the consortium. There needs to be more flexibility for involving third parties.
- Need to produce packages of "end-user materials": e.g. video or practice abstract to generate first interest, then brochure or manual with in-depth information
- Farmers ask for visual material: photo/video/figures
- Despite all opportunities offered by on-line tools, face-to-face exchange and field visits still work the best. Need good balance between on-line and "physical" activities. Also need a balance between social media and printed press.
- Language issue: a lot of farmers doesn't speak English. Translation is needed and requires a lot of resources. It can be better to do/produce less, but in more languages than producing a lot but only in English.

How can Thematic Networks work together and engage with other projects

- Link to EIP-AGRI website
- Link to ERA-NETs, e.g. ERA-Net CORE Organic in case of OK-Net Arable
- Exchange experiences with other thematic networks and projects
 - Dissemination
 - Building and using databases. Many thematic networks are building databases or knowledge hubs. We should exchange experiences on how to best build databases and make them user-friendly.
- Working with Operational Groups should be flexible, not compulsory → prevent formalistic rules. In some regions, Operational Groups are more advanced than in others. Working with - official, RDP funded- Operational Groups only would exclude less advanced regions. Thematic networks should be able to work with all kind of practice-oriented "innovation groups" that have similar objectives as Operational Groups.
- Thematic networks should work with existing and established "innovation groups", not try to set up own innovation groups.
- Be present at existing events, and link own activities to other workshops/conferences, e.g.



4 Conclusions and Synthesis of lessons learned

Adrien Guichaoua (ACTA- FR) – Co-chair of the SCAR SWG AKIS.

From the variety of subjects brought forward and suggestions made in the mini workshops, some lines can be distinguished: TNs play a role in engaging farmers in H2020 projects, they foster networking and engagement with other projects, and more work is to be done.

4.1 Engaging the farming sector in H2020 projects

The implementation of the interactive innovation approach and of the Multi-Actor Approach (MAA) is a novelty in the EU R&I projects under Horizon 2020. We notice some important inflections in the partnership and composition of the consortia where practitioners have a more important role together with researchers and other relevant actors of the AKIS. This trend even impact Horizon 2020 projects where the multi-actor approach is not required in the call. Researchers, who are still leading most of the H2020 projects seems motivated to engage them in this Interactive Innovation process in order to increase the impact of their activities.

However, there's still room for progress in engaging the farmers and other economics actors in Horizon 2020 projects. Some administrative barriers and language bottlenecks need to be remove to fulfil the objectives. The commitment of the farming sector at an early stage of the H2020 proposal is really necessary and key if we want to (i) identify farmer's needs and grounded objectives, (ii) to speed-up innovation uptake and farmer's adoption.

4.2 TN's networking and engagement with other projects

This meeting is a good example of networking activities, cross fertilisation and exchange of best practices. However, we should go beyond this event and connect these projects with other projects and initiatives at EU and national levels, but also and obviously at national or regional levels with Operational Groups (OGs).

We should seek for efficiency of public money and look for Synergies between RDPs (Rural development Plans) OGs and H2020 projects. Some H2020 TNs are well connected with specific OGs that have been set-up as "mirror groups" of the TNs in order to implement in the field certain actions (knowledge) coming from the outcomes of the TNs (i.e. "EuroDairy"; "Sheep Net").

TNs should also have a "multiplier effect/role": they should go beyond their own partnership and seek for impact in as much EU countries as possible (regarding the topic of the TN) by connecting with the relevant national and regional initiatives in order to reach an efficient EU wide AKIS. One need to adapt knowledge at local level in order to properly cope with the numerous specificities and challenges of the EU agriculture.

4.3 Recommendations and prospects

One should keep going this way as the commitment of such variety of actors in the projects and in the meeting show the relevance of these new projects paradigm.

One should show the efficiency and the impact of these projects to be sure that the EC will maintain these tools on the longer term and after 2020.

One should keep connecting together as Cross-fertilisation and Networking provide:

- Clear added-value to all kind of actors
- Open minds (think out of the box)
- Rationalise and make more efficient the works of each other (best practices, learn from failure etc...)

The SWG SCAR-AKIS is working on “monitoring the implementation of the H2020 TNs and the MAA projects” in order to learn from the several experiences and draw some useful recommendations for the R&I actors as well as for the policy makers (EU – National- Regional) that should be published in the Final AKIS4 report at the end of 2018.

It’s planned to organise a similar event in 2018 where other TNs will be invited to present their experiences.

Many thanks to Peter Paree (ZLTO) for initiating this meeting, to Kjell Ivarsson and Copa-Cogeca for hosting the event and to the EC –DG-AGRI for their support.