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# CAP and Advisory Services: From Farm Advisory Systems to Innovation Support

Politique agricole commune et services de conseil : des systèmes de conseil agricole au soutien à l'innovation

GAP und Beratungsdienste: Von Betriebsberatungssystemen zur Innovationsförderung

Pierre Labarthe and Monika Beck

## Introduction

Farm advisory services, and Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS), are important components of the future Common Agricultural Policy (2023–2027). Together they aim to promote a faster transition of European agriculture towards a more sustainable model, through the fostering and sharing of knowledge, and through supporting innovation. Whilst knowledge exchange and advisory measures are not new instruments of the CAP (the first measures were set up more than 15 years ago), this dimension of the CAP has been largely overlooked in academic literature, with very few publications on this topic (Angileri, 2007; Cristiano *et al.*, 2015; Kania and Kielbasa, 2011; Koutsouris, 2014).

The aim of our article is to put CAP advisory measures under the spotlight. In the current CAP period (2014–2022), there are two main and interrelated regulations that deal with advisory services. First is the European 'Farm Advisory System' (EU-FAS), which is a cross-cutting instrument compulsory for all Member States. It sits within the framework of the horizontal regulation of the CAP.<sup>1</sup> The second is a non-compulsory financial support measure to farm advisory services (Measure M02,<sup>2</sup> later referred to as 'knowledge measures' in this article), set within the framework of Rural Development Policy (the CAP's 2<sup>nd</sup> Pillar). This

article combines the outcomes of two studies commissioned by the European Commission (Box 1): an evaluation study implemented by a consortium of consultancies and researchers (Beck *et al.*, 2021) and a comparative analysis implemented in the frame of the H2020 research project AgriLink (Labarthe *et al.*, 2020).

The combination and synthesis of these two studies provides three main insights.

1. We provide a historical perspective that reveals a change in the CAP's advisory measures. Whilst initially focused on facilitating the implementation of cross-compliance, they became much more open measures supporting innovation and knowledge flows within AKIS. The professional status of farm advisors across European countries was more strongly acknowledged, offering new life-long training opportunities to advisors.
2. Despite this increased flexibility, both studies show that the implementation of advisory services within each Rural Development Programme (RDP) remains complex. An increased pluralism of the supply of farm advice in most EU countries is one of the causes of a low uptake.
3. As a result, the effects of these measures have been rather limited, with few farmers reached in total. Fostering inclusiveness of these

measures remains an ongoing challenge.

“ Il subsiste dans de nombreux contextes une absence de débat concernant la définition des groupes cibles bénéficiaires des politiques de conseil. ”

## Advisory measures and the CAP: a complex history at the crossroads of CAP regulation and measures

The history behind knowledge and advisory measures in the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is complex. This complexity relates to the fact that these concepts are enshrined in different CAP regulations (namely the farm advisory system and Pillar 2 support to knowledge and advisory measures), with shifting interrelations across periods of time. Three distinct periods can be differentiated (Figure 1).

### CAP 2007–2013

The CAP from 2007 to 2013 was the very first to include a mandatory 'Farm Advisory System' (also known as EU-FAS) for all Member States, with an explicit reference to farm advisory

services. The EU-FAS is closely linked to the introduction of cross-compliance of EU subsidies. The aim of EU-FAS was to guarantee that all European farmers would benefit from relevant knowledge and services to comply with EU standards. This was considered all the more important regarding the enlargement of the CAP to Central and Eastern Europe; as millions of new small farms had to comply with EU regulations. In this iteration the advisory measures in the first and second pillars were very strongly interrelated.

**The first Pillar enabled the creation of the EU-FAS.** Compulsory for all Member States, the scope of the FAS was at minimum cross-compliance. Cross-compliance whilst a broad topic (including EU regulations and Directives on public, animal and plant health; animal welfare; and the environment), also covered EU standards on Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions of land. The procedure involved a selection and accreditation of farm advisory organisations (or networks of organisations) that were officially acknowledged by each Member State as competent to deliver services on the full range of topics falling under cross-compliance.

**The second Pillar provided potential funding** for advisory organisations accredited under the EU-FAS regulation. This measure was not compulsory for Member States,

### Box 1: Material and methods

This article provides a synthesis of two recent studies implemented on European policies dealing with knowledge and advisory services for farmers

The first is a component of the H2020 project AgriLink (Labarthe *et al.*, 2020<sup>3</sup>). The analysis was implemented in 16 EU Member States: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain and the UK.

The second is a study of the Common Agricultural Policy's impact on knowledge exchange and advisory activities (Beck *et al.*, 2020<sup>4</sup>). The study covered the EU-28 with case studies in eight Member States and nine regions, namely in Belgium (Flanders), Estonia, France (Lorraine), Germany (Lower-Saxony), Greece, Ireland, Italy (Veneto and Umbria) and Poland.

The two studies combine various sources of data: 1) literature reviews; 2) in depth-analysis of CAP regulations and the framework for their implementation in Member States; 3) an analysis of RDP Annual Implementation (AIR Reports) regarding objectives; 4) an analysis of European Structural and Investment Funds database (EISF) regarding funding; 5) an analysis of the JRC database developed on EU-FAS; and 6) case studies relying on interviews with AKIS experts.

and the scope of advice was the same as the EU-FAS. Concretely, organisations accredited under EU-FAS could have their activities (mostly farm-level diagnostics encompassing all cross-compliance issues) refunded up to 2000€ per farmer.

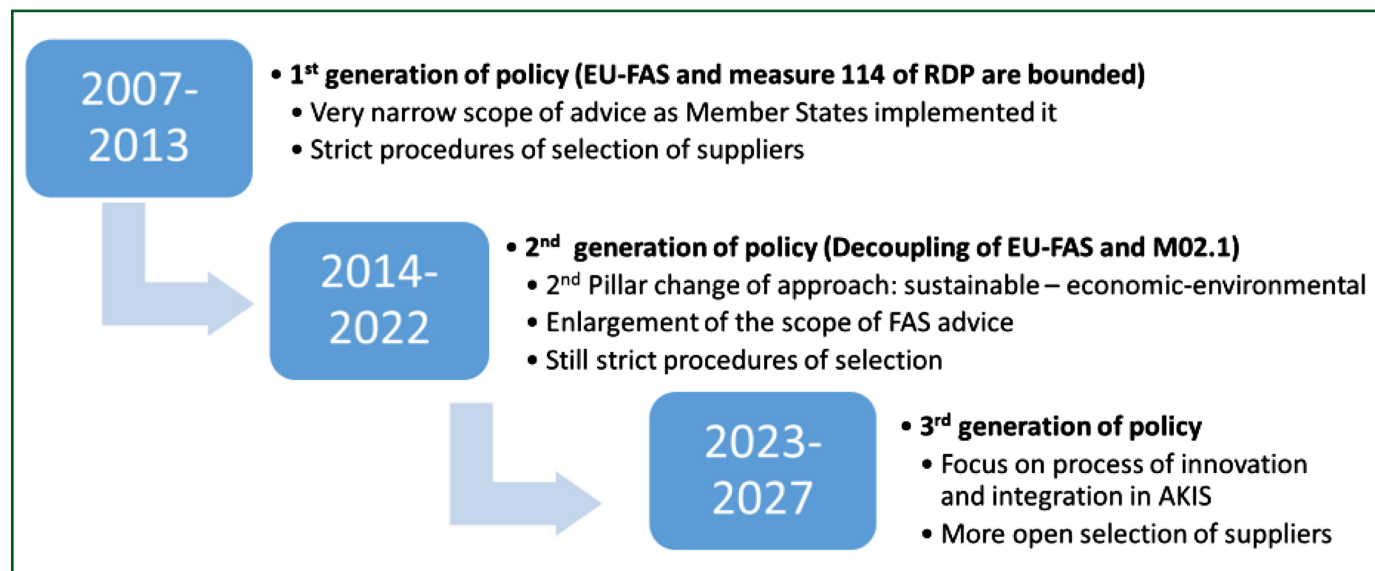
The advisory measures of CAP 2007–2013 had limited impact at farm level with few beneficiaries identified (ADE, 2009). The scope of these measures was suggested to be too narrow and complex and actions were therefore taken in the next CAP iteration (2014–2022) to enlarge the scope and the nature of support to advisors.

### CAP 2014–2022

**The EU-FAS under the horizontal regulation<sup>5</sup> still sought the accreditation of advisory organisations within an official farm advisory system.** It was still compulsory for Member States, and the scope was extended to cover new topics such as Greening, the Water Framework Directive and Integrated Pest Management. A minimum qualification level and training to access necessary aids for farm modernisation investments was required.

**The advisory measures from the second pillar were decoupled from EU-FAS.** These were still

Figure 1: Evolution of instruments within the CAP targeting farm advisory services



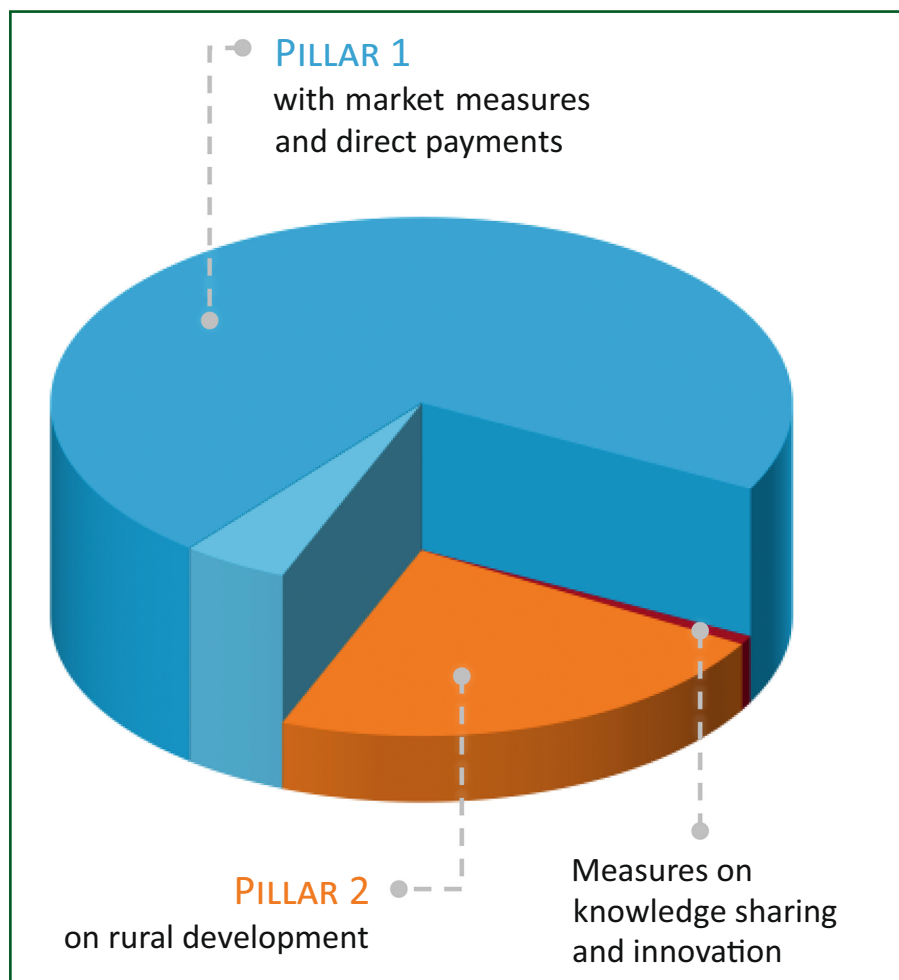
non-compulsory but the measures were diversified. The Measure M2 of the Rural Development Programmes proposed three types of support for Member States: i) supporting the uptake of advice (M02.1); ii) setting up advisory services (M02.2); and iii) training advisors (M02.3). The measure supporting farmers' uptake of advice (M02.1) was based on strict public procurement procedures of advisory organisations that saw certain expenditures refunded.

“ In vielen Kontexten fehlt es nach wie vor an einer Debatte über die Definition der Zielgruppen von Beratungsmaßnahmen. ”

### CAP 2023–2027

The future CAP (2023–2027) expects major changes regarding knowledge and advisory measures as both agriculture and rural areas are central to the policy objectives of the European Green Deal. The CAP (2023–2027) encourages farmers and other actors to increase their efforts to accelerate the necessary transition to a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food

Figure 2: Share of CAP budget on knowledge sharing and innovation measures

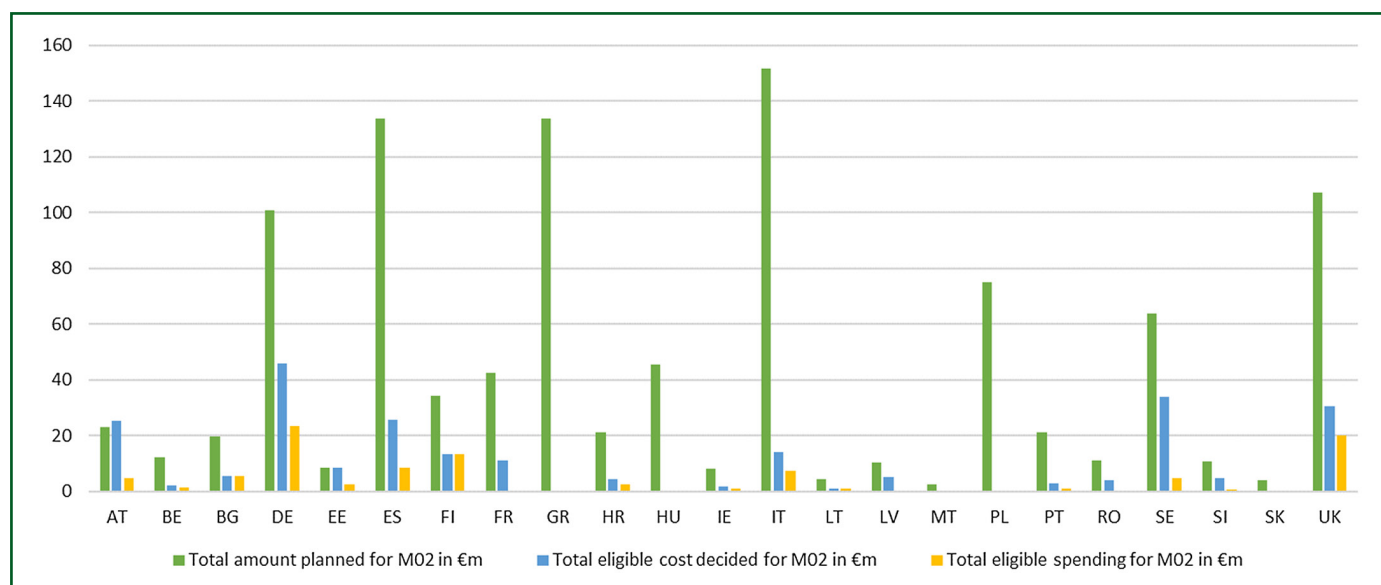


Source: Beck et al. (2020).

system by 2030. Member States each prepared national Strategic Plans related to a series of specific and cross-cutting objectives, including one focused on the fostering and

sharing of knowledge as well as supporting innovation (Art. 5). Three major changes regarding advisory measures in the post-2022 CAP regulation are proposed :

Figure 3: Planned M02 expenditure in 2015 in the preliminary planning of the CAP 2014–2021, Actual budget agreed and Actual expenditure as of 2020



Source: Beck et al. (2020).

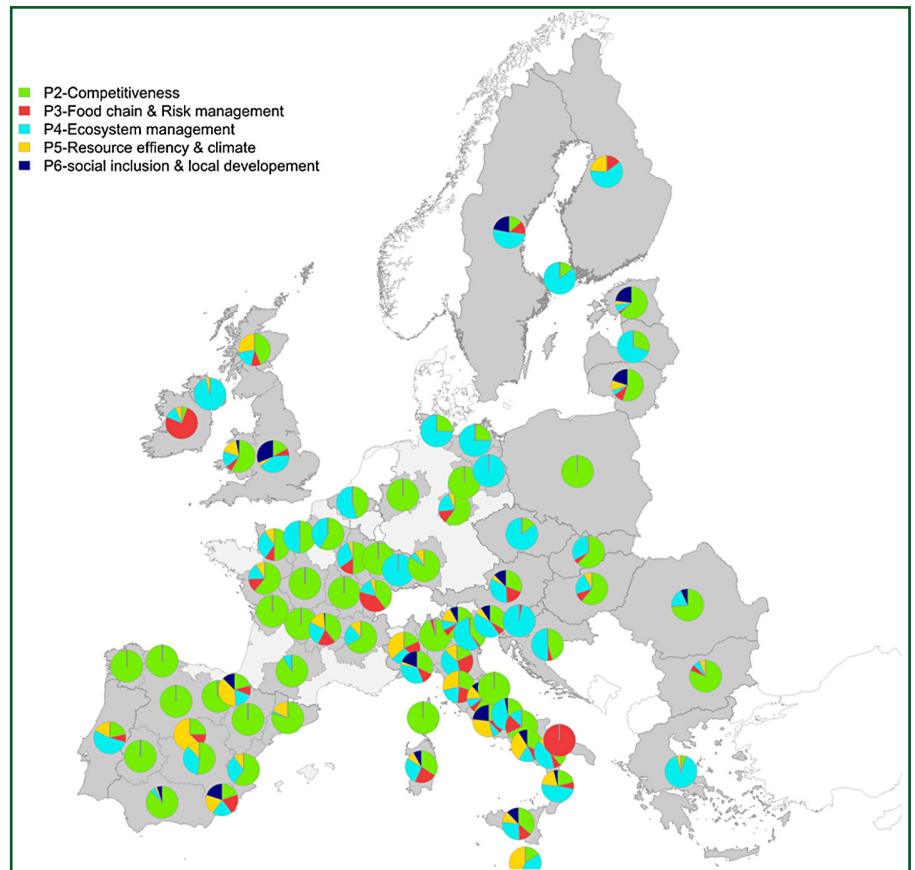
1. There is no longer a reference to an official 'Farm Advisory System' linked to direct CAP support. Instead, there is a far more open view regarding who the advisory suppliers are contributing to CAP objectives. However, certain conditions remain, with an emphasis on impartiality and independence (Sutherland and Labarthe, this issue). The aim is to avoid explicit biases in the advisory content delivered from private sales representatives of inputs, equipment or machinery.
2. Following the subsidiarity principle, how to select, fund and support these suppliers is largely left to Member States.
3. Member States have to integrate advisory measures into the broader Strategic Approach for AKIS elaborated in their CAP Strategic Plans (based on a SWOT analysis and needs assessments). In other words, advisory measures are to be integrated within broader innovation policies. This strategic approach is further broken down into targeted interventions through a series of specific articles.<sup>6</sup>

“ There remains in many contexts a lack of debate concerning the definition of target beneficiary groups of advisory policies, as well as a lack of monitoring on the current beneficiaries. ”

### Learning from advisory measures of the CAP 2014–2022

This section provides a more in-depth analysis of the effects of the second generation of CAP instruments dealing with farm advice (2014–2020<sup>7</sup>).

**Figure 4: Priorities assigned to the measure M02.1 of the RDPs**



Note: The pie chart represents how a Member State (or a region) distributes the expected impact of the Measure M02 of the second pillar of the CAP between the 5 Priorities of the 2014–2022 RDP.

Source: AgriLink, Deliverable D4.1, data; ENRD.

### How much was spent on advisory measures in the CAP (2014–2020)?

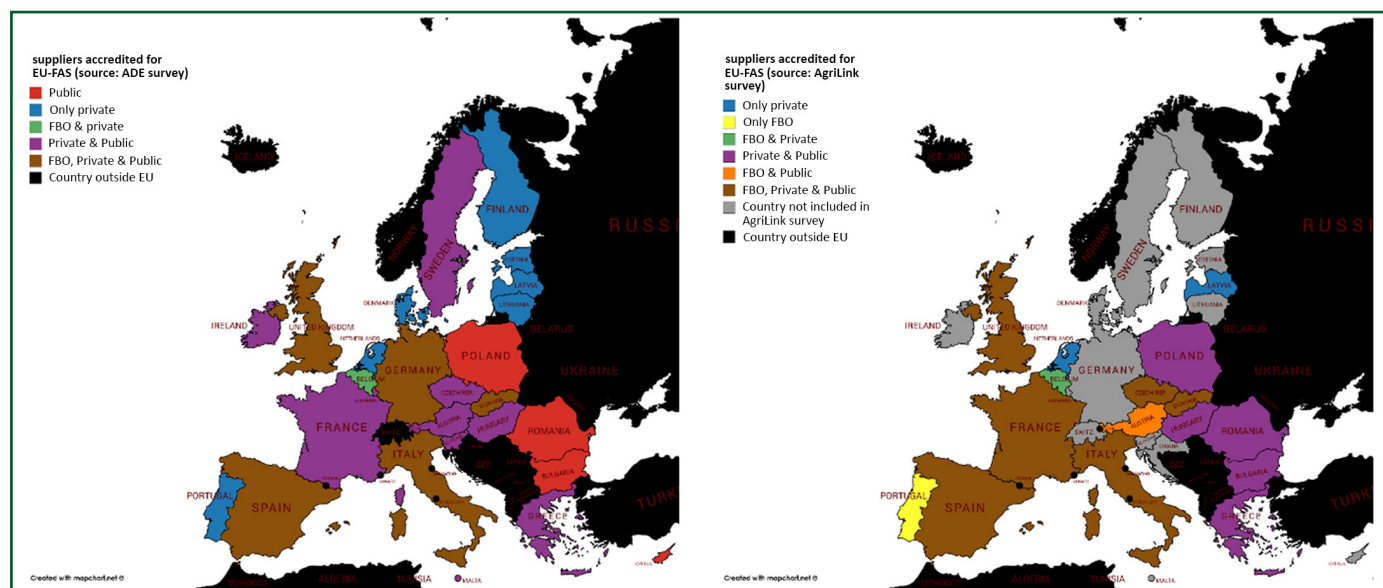
It is important to bear in mind that despite the increasing importance of instruments targeting farm advice, they remained a very marginal expenditure within the overall CAP budget for 2014–2020 (Figure 2).

Priority 1 of the Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) was a cross-cutting measure related to Knowledge and Innovation. At first, it positively influenced the overall initial budget allocation of each Member State, (green bars in Figure 3) but the budget actually eligible for advisory services in later stages (under M02) was much lower (blue bars in Figure 3). The eligible amount was 20 per cent lower compared to the previous CAP period (2007–2013). According to interviewees, this situation was mainly due to administrative constraints related to the application of strict public procurement procedures. Not only

did Member States opt to allocate considerably less funding to Measure M02 than originally proposed in 2014, but the actual expenditure of most Member States was much lower (yellow bars in Figure 3). This did not necessarily imply a decrease of public support for farm advice since for several Member States, these services were supported by national or regional funds (for instance Wallonia in Belgium, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, France, Luxembourg, some German regions and the Netherlands).

**Effects on the scope and methods of farm advice.** Our analysis of the measure M02 of the CAP also reveals a plurality of objectives associated with farm advice by Member States. The Rural Development Programmes supported advisory services with the aim 'to improve the sustainable management and the economic and environmental performance of farms'. Thus, a holistic approach to the farm was encouraged and a very large range

**Figure 5: Identities of suppliers accredited for the EU-FAS for the CAP 2007–2014 (map on the left, source ADE 2009) and for the CAP 2014–2022 (map on the right, source: AgriLink, deliverable D4.1)**



of topics integrated into a broader economic and environmental farm approach was covered. The diversity of topics is evident in Figure 4 which presents the priorities assigned to the Rural Development Measure (M02) by Member States (or regions when decisions are taken at this level). The second pillar of the CAP was organised with various priorities, including Competitiveness (P2), Food Chain and Risk Management (P3), Ecosystem Management (P4), Resource Efficiency & Climate (P5) and Social Inclusion & Local Development (P6). Member States were invited to explain which priority they expected the knowledge measure of the CAP to contribute towards. Competitiveness was a key

objective for many countries while several others targeted ecosystem management (Figure 4).

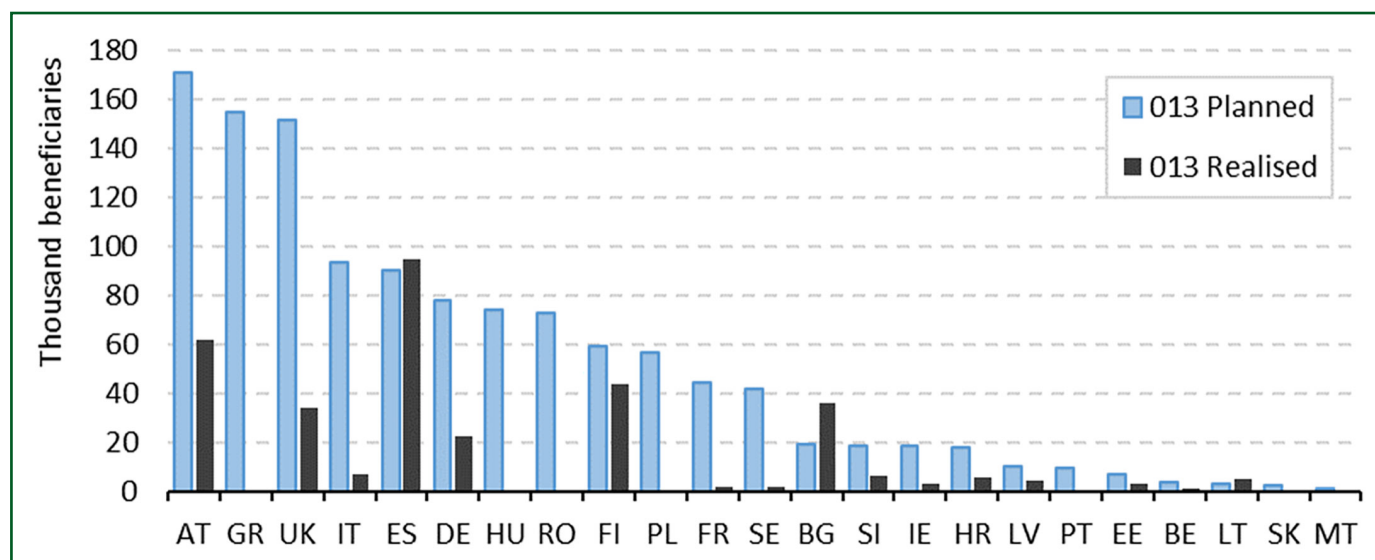
There are also regional differences within a given country (e.g. France or Italy). Moreover, many countries or regions considered that financial support for advice contributes to several priorities, mixing competitiveness with other objectives and therefore adopting a holistic view of farm advice, at least on paper.

This is further confirmed in our case studies when considering the advisory themes actually implemented by Member States, that targeted both farmers' direct needs (technical, economic, social related topics) and

wider societal needs (carbon management, biodiversity, environment and animal welfare). However, some Member States put more emphasis on societal themes and quality of life, including Flanders in Belgium, France, Italy, Lower Saxony in Germany and Ireland. Others have concentrated CAP-facilitated advice on themes relating to farmers' direct farm-business needs, giving little attention to societal topics, e.g. Estonia, Greece and Poland.

Importantly, the CAP had not only direct effects for farmers, but also indirect ones in the back-office dimension of farm advice (Labarthe and Laurent, 2013a), through the

**Figure 6: Number of beneficiaries advised under M2.1**



Source: ADE based on 2018 AIR dataset.



Dry meadow, French Pyrenees © Tania Runge

enhancement of skills and competences of advisors. In many Member States, the CAP was an efficient way of enhancing AKIS functions, especially considering the training of advisors. Training advisors is essential to meet CAP objectives since this was required by both the EU-FAS and by the advisory services funded under the Rural Development Programme. Moreover, a clear willingness to go beyond traditional training methods was evidenced. Overall, CAP measures supported and encouraged various forms of knowledge exchange such as on-farm demonstrations, farm visits and interactive innovation projects.

**Who benefited from these advisory measures? On the supply side, a growing heterogeneity of profiles of suppliers.** Compared to the first implementation period of the EU-FAS, accredited advisory suppliers were very diverse in most countries, with a growing share of Farmer-based Organisations and a lesser role for public actors. This situation may relate to the increased pluralism (or even

fragmentation) of advisory suppliers described in other studies (Knierim *et al.*, 2017) and associated with a long trend of privatisation of these services (Garforth *et al.*, 2003). Figure 5 highlights certain differences between our case studies countries and compares the earlier CAP (2007–2013) to the second implementation of farm advice instruments in CAP (2014–2020). The heterogeneity between countries masks a second level of diversity: a plurality found amongst accredited suppliers within a given country. This diversity is also higher in certain countries than in others.

**Who benefited from advisory measures? On the demand side, fewer farmers reached and a lack of debate about target beneficiaries.** The number of farmers benefiting from one-to-one advice funded under Rural Development sub-measure M2.1 increased compared to the previous CAP period (2007–2013). This was despite the reduction in the overall budget and the limited implementation up to end of 2018. Almost 334,000

farmers were advised one-to-one by the end of 2018, approximately 28 per cent of the target. This equated to almost twice the level achieved over the entire 2007–2013 period (with only 178,500 beneficiaries advised). Case studies highlighted some critical success factors for advisory activities. These included widespread beneficiary awareness of opportunities for available training and advice and enhanced integration within existing networks and trusted providers. Importantly, the sources of knowledge exchange and advice have to be locally accessible, identified as credible and able to deal with a range of individual situations. Advisors in addition must be trusted sources and kept up to date with research and relevant practices.

Despite this progress, some legitimate doubts can be raised about the inclusiveness of these measures.

- The total CAP beneficiaries of M2.1 still only equated to approximately 5 per cent of farmers eligible for overall CAP support (Figure 6). Hence, very



Galloway calf, Brandenburg Germany © Dominic Runge

few farmers actually benefited from the measure, at least directly.

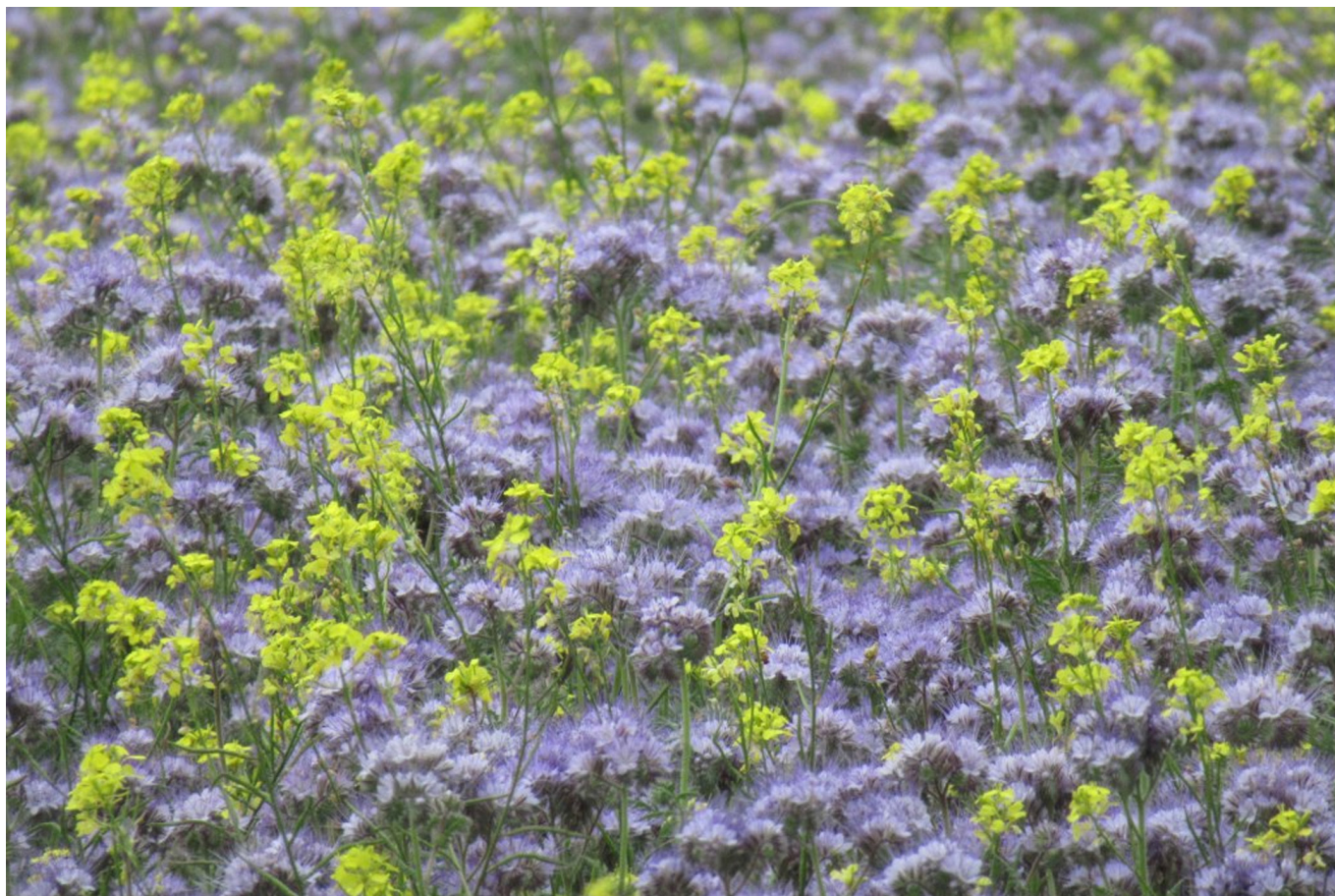
- There is very little information about who the beneficiaries of these measures are. There is no systematic monitoring that collects specific demographic and structural data to characterise them further and compare them with

census data or Farm Accountancy Data Network (FADN).

- There were fewer debates about groups targeted for advisory support under the current measures than there had been for the CAP 2007–2013. In this former iteration, various Member States had identified target groups, including women, young

farmers, part-time farmers, farmers in remote areas and farmers that had not received advice for several consecutive years (ADE, 2009).

- In the absence of any targeting, there is a risk that measures primarily benefit bigger farms or farmers already benefiting from other measures (Labarthe and



Bees foraging plot, Estonia © Jaan Liira

Laurent, 2013b). In certain regions, Beck *et al.* (2021) demonstrate some positive correlations between farmers benefiting from knowledge measures and farmers who make use of investment opportunities supported by other RDP measures (e.g. support for setting-up new businesses). These farmers also often have farms of a larger size. Evidence from the first generation of EU-FAS policy (2017–2013) in certain countries or regions (e.g. Flanders, Belgium) already showed that the beneficiaries tended to be holders of bigger farms (Bas *et al.*, 2009).

## Conclusions and recommendations

Farm advisory services have gradually become an important topic within the CAP. The evolution of CAP advisory measures enabled the scope of advice to be enlarged and to bridge farm innovation with sustainability issues. The measures and associated debates

advocated for the emergence of a farm advisory profession and subsequently improved training resources. However, our results also highlight that EU-funded farm advice only reaches a small proportion of farmers, despite recent improvements. In addition, there remains in many contexts a lack of debate concerning the definition of target beneficiary groups of advisory policies, as well as a lack of monitoring on the current beneficiaries.

Hence, the question of access to agricultural advice remains an important issue. This access must be guaranteed to all European farmers and financial resources should be made available to support these activities. There are still 'hard-to-reach' categories of farmers including farm workers (Labarthe *et al.*, this issue). These groups include many conventional farmers but also other categories within farm businesses and beyond, including women, young people, part-time workers, elderly farmers and farm households, and other farm workers. Specific CAP funding which targets these groups with knowledge

exchange, advice and innovation adapted to their specific needs should be provided. However, connecting with 'hard-to-reach populations' is not merely a financial matter. Funding opportunities are important yet there is also a strong need to re-design services that better target these populations. Policies should be better informed utilising analysis from surveys on these needs. This would then ensure that Member States examine where the need for advice and training is greatest among all potential CAP beneficiaries.

## Notes

1 Reg. (EU) No 1306/2013, Art. 12 to 14.

2 Reg. (EU) No 1305/2013, Art. 15.

3 We would like to thank Matthieu Ansaloni, Catherine Laurent, Natalia Bellostas, Lee-Ann Sutherland, Raluca Barbu, Stijn Bossin, Ellen Bulten, Violeta Dirimanova, Emils Kilis, Ekaterina Kleshcheva, Marta Konečná, Andrea Krčková A., Alberto Lafarga, Livia Madureira, Cristina Micheloni, Christina Noble, Christopher Opancar, Jaroslav Prazan, Mark Redman, Zuzana

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5 EU Regulation 1306/2013.

6 Articles 71, 72, 113, 114.

7 All our figures are based on 2014–2020 data, the transition period (2021–2022) was not identified at the time both studies were implemented.



Arable land left fallow, 3rd year, Lower Saxony, Germany © Tania Runge

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# Summary


## CAP and Advisory Services: From Farm Advisory Systems to Innovation Support

 Farm advisory services have become an important topic in the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) of the European Union (EU). The aim of this article is to draw lessons from the implementation of the regulation and measures of the current 2014–2022 CAP in knowledge transfer and advisory services to contribute to debates about the future of farm advisory policies. Findings are based on two studies commissioned by the European Commission: an evaluation study implemented by a consortium of consultancies and researchers and a comparative analysis implemented in the frame of the H2020 research project AgriLink. The article first provides a historical perspective of the ‘knowledge and advice’ dimension of the CAP since 2007. We show a gradual transition towards greater flexibility of measures supporting innovation and knowledge flows. The professional status of farm advisors across European countries was more strongly acknowledged, offering new life-long training opportunities to advisors. However, the implementation of CAP’s advisory measures remains complex. As a result, the effects of these measures have been rather limited, with only few farmers reached overall. Fostering an inclusiveness of these measures remains an ongoing challenge for policymakers.

## Politique agricole commune et services de conseil : des systèmes de conseil agricole au soutien à l’innovation

 Les services de conseil agricole sont devenus un thème important de la politique agricole commune (PAC) de l’Union européenne (UE). L’objectif de cet article est de tirer les enseignements de la mise en œuvre du règlement et des mesures de l’actuelle PAC 2014–2022 dans le transfert de connaissances et services de conseil agricole, pour contribuer aux débats sur l’avenir des politiques de conseil agricole. Les conclusions sont basées sur deux études commandées par la Commission européenne: une étude d’évaluation réalisée par un consortium de consultants et de chercheurs et une analyse comparative mise en œuvre dans le cadre du projet de recherche de H2020 AgriLink. L’article propose d’abord une mise en perspective historique de la dimension ‘connaissances et conseil’ de la PAC depuis 2007. Nous montrons une transition progressive vers une plus grande flexibilité des mesures de soutien à l’innovation et aux flux de connaissances. Le statut professionnel des conseillers agricoles dans les pays européens a été plus fortement reconnu, offrant de nouvelles possibilités de formation aux conseillers tout au long de leur carrière. Cependant, la mise en œuvre des mesures de conseil de la PAC reste complexe. En conséquence, les effets de ces mesures ont été plutôt limités, avec seulement quelques agriculteurs concernés dans l’ensemble. Favoriser le caractère inclusif de ces mesures reste un défi permanent pour les décideurs de l’action publique.

## GAP und Beratungsdienste: Von Betriebsberatungssystemen zur Innovationsförderung

 Landwirtschaftliche Beratungsdienste sind ein wichtiges Thema in der Gemeinsamen Agrarpolitik (GAP) der Europäischen Union (EU) geworden. Ziel dieses Artikels ist es, Lehren aus der Umsetzung der Verordnungen und Maßnahmen der aktuellen GAP 2014–2022 (EU-FAS und Wissensmaßnahme) zu ziehen, um einen Beitrag zu den Debatten über die Zukunft der landwirtschaftlichen Beratungspolitik zu leisten. Die Ergebnisse basieren auf zwei Studien, die von der Europäischen Kommission in Auftrag gegeben wurden: eine Evaluierungsstudie eines Konsortiums aus Beratungsunternehmen und Forschern und eine vergleichende Analyse, die im Rahmen des H2020-Forschungsprojekts AgriLink, durchgeführt wurde. Der Artikel gibt zunächst einen historischen Überblick über den Bereich ‘Wissen und Beratung’ der GAP seit 2007. Wir zeigen einen allmählichen Übergang zu einer größeren Flexibilität der Maßnahmen auf, die der Förderung von Innovation und Wissensfluss dienen. Der berufliche Status von landwirtschaftlich Beratenden wurde in allen europäischen Ländern stärker anerkannt, was den Beratenden neue Möglichkeiten zur lebenslangen Weiterbildung bot. Die Umsetzung der GAP-Beratungsmaßnahmen bleibt jedoch schwierig. Als Folge hiervon waren die Auswirkungen dieser Maßnahmen ziemlich begrenzt und es konnten nur wenige Landwirte erreicht werden. Es bleibt weiterhin eine Herausforderung für die politischen Entscheidungsträger, die Einbeziehung dieser Maßnahmen zu fördern.

summary