

# Evaluating the implementation and the success of EIP-Agri?

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Outcome of workshop 1.2 (Topic 2) “[Evaluating the interpretation and implementation of the European Innovation Partnership \(EIP\) at national and regional level](#)” at IFSA Conference 1-4 April 2014 in Berlin (Conference website and book of abstracts: [http://project2.zalf.de/IFSA\\_2014](http://project2.zalf.de/IFSA_2014))

## Authors

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## Background and objective of the workshop

The European Innovation Partnership for ‘Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability’ (EIP-Agri) aims to enhance a close cooperation and intensive knowledge exchange between farmers, researchers, advisors, NGOs and other actors of the agricultural, food and forestry sector. Operational Groups will be established aiming to develop and test innovative approaches and foster cooperation of actors and organizations at the grassroot level. These groups or innovation projects are supposed to be connected with other regional or national level activities as well as supra-national groups and agencies such as EIP-Focus Groups, Thematic Networks and other EU level activities. This emerging system of horizontal and vertical EIP partnering and information flow will be complex and, moreover, it is expected to be dynamic over time enhancing continuous flexibility and adaptation when new challenges and opportunities come up. The Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development encourages the responsible policy teams to interlink existing policy instruments such as EAFRD, Horizon 2020 and national research funds for better synergy. As practiced successfully in past, the evaluation systems for these policy programmes will focus on the particular objective of each measure. At the IFSA-conference, held in April 2014, a workshop discussed the relevance and the requirements of an over-arching evaluation approach taking into account the complexity of the EIP-Agri concept. During this workshop, organised and facilitated by Susanne von Münchhausen and Anna Häring of Eberswalde University for Sustainable Development, international authors from Italy, the Netherlands, Australia and New Zealand presented scientific papers on various aspects of and experiences with different evaluation concepts. Based on these papers, a panel discussion with authors and invited experts in the field of innovation and evaluation was held aiming to develop a draft guideline for a potential development of an EIP-Agri evaluation approach.

## Workshop results

- There is a public interest in measuring the outcome and success of the new policy concept because a high amount of administrative and policy capacities as well as financial resources are dedicated to EIP-Agri implementation.
- Since a core objective of EIP-Agri is the interconnection of programmes and actors, listed result of individually evaluated policy schemes will be insufficient for the assessment of the over-arching system linking people and ideas. A systemic view is important.

- The evaluation criteria and instruments for EIP evaluation will need to be targeted up to clearly defined operational objectives or sub-objectives (Williams et al., 2014).

For that reason, it is important

- To break down the overarching objectives of “bridging the gap” or “research results fast into practice” or “producing more with less”;
- To clarify the logic of the concept and the policy measures, principles and key result areas (Coutts et al. 2014)
- To define more precisely where and how the EIP-Agri wants to go beyond existing practices and policies;
- To work with a variety of qualitative and quantitative measurements per sector or per area e.g. “share of farmers with OPG involvement”, “number of OPGs”, “number of local dissemination events/participants”, “clicks on farmers’ innovation website”, “number of farms using the new technology”, “classifications of OPG as ‘inspiring partnership’ on the feedback form”, “number of new proposals emerging from existing OPG”, “number of students’ thesis on-farm”, “better and more cross-disciplinary cooperation”, “cost reduction”, “positive impacts on nature conservation, climate gas emissions, social integration”... (Proetti and Cristiano, 2013).
- To use evaluation criteria and key figures which are as easy as possible to assess!
- Mid-term or ex-post evaluations of the over-arching EIP-Agri concept would need a base-line/status-quo for a comparison of the situation ‘before and after EIP-Agri implementation’.
- Mid-term or ex-post evaluations of OPGs and/or innovation projects and their embeddedness in wider professional networks need a base-line for the comparison of the situation ‘before and after’ (status-quo on the grassroots level):
  - The extension of the ‘new’ technology, breed, organisation or management methods will need to be assessed on the local/regional level in the beginning of the project – status-quo analysis based on regional statistics or quick assessment by OPG or innovation team before the project or activity starts).
  - Each grant agreement might require a deliverable showing some basic facts and information on the situation in the area or sector at the beginning.
- Mid-term or ex-post evaluation will be unsuitable for an on-going or short-term adjustment of EIP tools. The concept is new. Learning from trial and error will be particularly important during the first years. Each evaluation should start with the beginning of an OPG, network or innovation project ensuring an accompanying evaluation. It offers the opportunity of an on-going fine-tuning of group and network dynamics and working steps.
- External evaluation of participative processes could impact negatively on group dynamics and the individual engagement of actors (‘feeling of supervision’); pressure and controlling might hamper the innovative spirit and creativity of the partnerships. Recommendations of an ‘outsider’ would have to be accepted and put in place by the ‘insiders’.
  - In contrast, self-reflexive processes of group or network participants can enhance learning and adaptation of the group as a whole;
  - foster individual and group flexibility and quick changes of the group’s work;
  - saves costs of external evaluation;
  - covers not only ‘facts’ but as well ‘feelings’ – important for innovation groups;
  - includes all involved actors;
  - require excellent facilitation and process evaluation methods.

- Preliminary results from New Zealand show that the evaluation of the innovation process has identified key performance measures for the National Innovation Project. The tools put in place are providing useful mechanisms to capturing monitoring and evaluation data at the process, impact and learning levels to date. The project structure is showing promise in fostering cooperative innovation development. Moreover, experiences highlight there is a need to constantly stand back from the data and remind participants about the need to see what is being learnt about the implementation of co-innovation principles (Coutts et.al, 2014).

## Conclusion

Self-reflexive evaluation of the participative processes starting at the beginning of EIP, OPG and innovation network implementation will help

- to identify key features of effective innovation processes and the related parameters
- to guide the program or project in its implementation
- to report on the impacts/benefits of the program or project
- to capture the lessons to inform future/on-going application of a participative innovation approach
- to observe and provide feedback to innovation projects' participants and the Community of Practice, and based on this, enhance the flexibility of actors and groups and fosters quick adaptation

## Authors of scientific papers and participants in the panel discussion

**Krijn POPPE** (2014) Linking Innovation and Research in Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems

**Jeff COUTTS**, Neels BOTHA & James A. TURNER (2014) Evaluating a Co-innovation Policy Initiative in New Zealand

**Simona CRISTIANO** & Patrizia PROIETTI (2014) Farm Innovation through Rural Development Programmes 2014-2020: an evaluation model of the EIP

James A. TURNER, Kelly RIJSWIJK, **Tracy WILLIAMS**, Laurens KLERKX & Tim BARNARD (2014) Systemic problems hampering innovation in the New Zealand Agricultural Innovation System

**Bettina König**, Researcher at Humboldt University, Berlin. Expertise: Enhancing innovation in agriculture

**Birge Wolf**, Researcher at Kassel University. Expertise: Evaluation of agricultural research, measuring the contribution of science to innovation

The audience contributed significantly to the discussion (around 30-40 international scientists in the field of AKIS, farming systems, innovation, agricultural policy etc.).

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