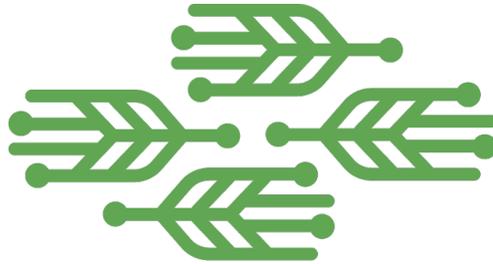Deliverable 5.9 Policy Brief

EURAKNOS

Connecting Thematic Networks as Knowledge Reservoirs towards a European Agricultural Knowledge Innovation Open-Source System

EURAKNOS

TASK 5.3

Summary

The aim of Work Package (WP) 5 is to widen and maximize the impact of the EURAKNOS project through dedicated communication, dissemination, exploitation and networking activities. The specific objectives of WP5 are to:
- develop a detailed and dynamic communication plan;
- elaborate a detailed and dynamic dissemination plan and exploitation plan;
- efficiently communicate the concept, progress and results of EURAKNOS to a wide variety of stakeholders;
- disseminate EURAKNOS outputs with a focus on two groups of key actors: Thematic Network (TN) coordinators as multipliers and farmers, foresters and advisors as users;
- provide a wide range of materials targeted at users;
- link to educational programs and training initiatives;
- promote cross-exchange between different TNs.

Task 5.3 focuses on the project working closely with other projects or initiatives which are investigating aspects of a similar nature, whether led by industry, researchers, national or EU policymakers. This will ensure that the outputs of the project draw on the findings from other projects and, in turn, inform these other research and innovation projects, and policy development processes. Horizon Europe, Operational Groups (OGs), and other multi-actor projects linked to the national and regional implementation of the European Innovation Partnership (EIP-AGRI), also provide clear scope for complementarity and networking.

Deliverable 5.9: Policy Brief:
In cooperation with the Strategic Working Group of the Standing Committee on Agricultural Research on Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (SWG SCAR AKIS), a policy paper will be written to create awareness on the EURAKNOS output to policymakers, government institutions, advisory groups, decision making bodies, etc. It addresses policymakers and funding agencies at European, national and regional level on how to ensure sustainability of TNs and their outputs, ensuring integration into the EIP-AGRI and the Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS) at national and European levels.

Results and conclusion:
Six policy recommendations that relate to the sustainability of TNs and their outputs are presented. The Policy Brief article is published on the EURAKNOS website and in the Horizon Results Platform (policy related results).

Deliverable Number	Work Package
5.9	WP5
Lead Beneficiary	Deliverable Author(S)
IfA	Laura Palczynski
Beneficiaries	Deliverable Co-Author (S)
AU (ICROFS), GLZ, IDELE, IfA, NAK, PSKW, RAU, UGent, USC	Sylvia Burssens (UGent), Ilse A. Rasmussen (ICROFS/AU)

Planned Delivery Date			Actual Delivery Date	
31/03/2021			01/12/2021	
Type of Deliverable	R	Document, report (excluding periodic and final reports)		X
	DEC	Websites, patents filing, press & media actions, videos		
	E	Ethics		

Dissemination Level	PU	Public		X
	CO	Confidential, only for members of the consortium		

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List of abbreviations and acronyms

AKIS	–	Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems
CAP	–	Common Agricultural Policy
COPA-COGECA	–	Committee of Professional Agricultural Organizations and General Confederation of Agricultural Cooperatives
DG-AGRI	–	Directorate-General Agriculture and Rural Development
EIP-AGRI	–	European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability
e-KRP	–	e-Knowledge Reservoir Platform
EU	–	European Union
EURAKNOS	–	Connecting Thematic Networks as Knowledge Reservoirs: towards a European Agricultural Knowledge Innovation Open-Source System
EUREKA	–	European Knowledge Repository for Best Agricultural Practices
F2F	–	face-to-face
FAO	–	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
H2020	–	Horizon 2020
HE	–	Horizon Europe
HIKR	–	High Impact Knowledge Reservoir
KER	–	Key Exploitable Result
KIP	–	Knowledge Innovation Panel
KR	–	Knowledge Reservoir
KT	–	Knowledge Transfer
MAP	–	Multi-actor project
NRN	–	National Rural Network
OG	–	Operational Group
PLAID	–	Peer-to-peer learning: Accessing Innovation through Demonstration
SWG SCAR AKIS	–	Strategic Working Group of the Standing Committee on Agricultural Research on Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems
SKIN	–	Short supply chain Knowledge and Innovation Network
TN	–	Thematic Network
WP	–	Work Package

EURAKNOS

1. Introduction

1.1. Project overview

EURAKNOS (Connecting Thematic Networks as Knowledge Reservoirs: towards a European Agricultural Knowledge Innovation Open-Source System) is a Thematic Network (TN) created with the aim of collating knowledge from all European Union (EU)-funded TNs focused on agriculture and forestry, to build a practice-oriented knowledge community. The state of play at the start of the project was that 34 Horizon 2020 (H2020) TNs were collecting, producing, and disseminating knowledge for practitioners independently from each other. These 34 TNs have the potential to maximize the uptake and impact of new knowledge by stimulating shared learning and coordinating the dissemination of practical information.

EURAKNOS aims to strengthen the EU agricultural knowledge base by co-creating the 'network to connect all TNs'. To achieve this objective, EURAKNOS will:

- Facilitate and support TNs, linking similar initiatives at EU and national levels and feeding into national educational and training programmes.
- Widen and connect existing TNs to build knowledge reservoirs within the Agricultural European Innovation Partnership (EIP-AGRI).
- Collect, evaluate and compare the knowledge, materials and tools that have been produced by TNs and Operational Groups (OGs).
- Develop a harmonised approach by producing technical guidelines on how to make a high-impact knowledge reservoir.
- Develop a blueprint for creating an EU-wide, dynamic, open-source agricultural knowledge innovation database, and explore the value of doing this.
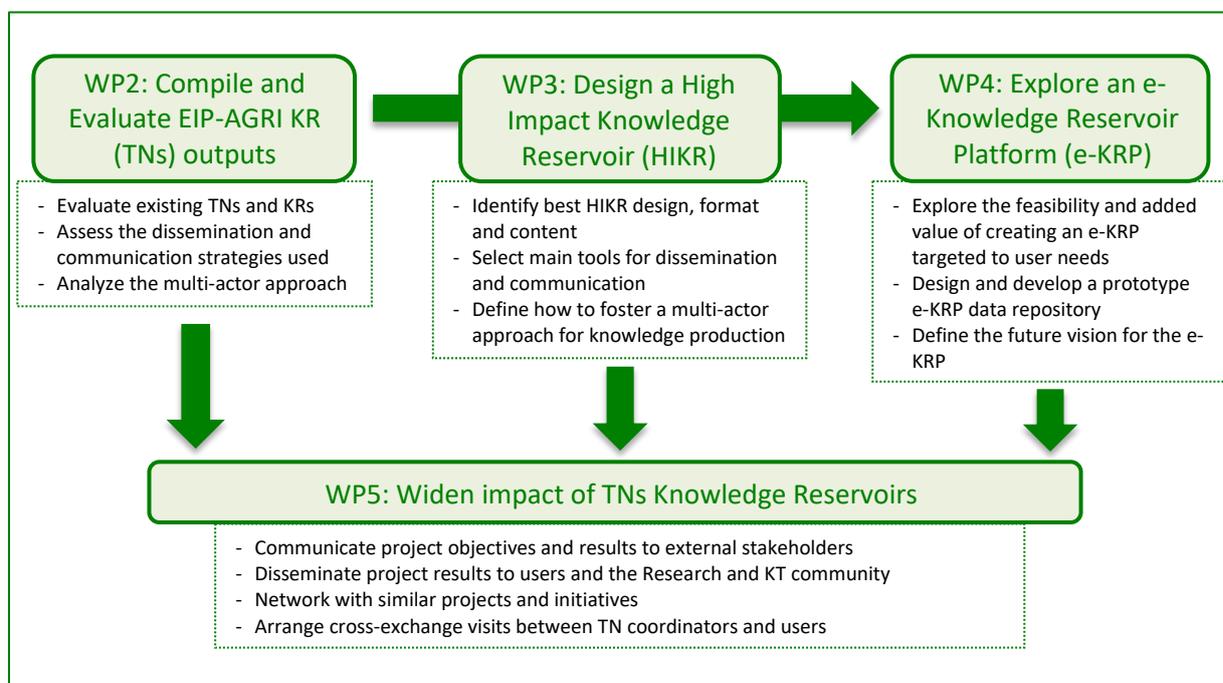

Figure 1: Links between work packages in the EURAKNOS project

The main objectives of EURAKNOS are to:
1) Develop guidelines for building a successful TN based on the multi-actor approach.
2) Define best dissemination practices (tools, materials, channels…) with high impact on the users - in particular farmers, foresters, and advisors.
3) Develop a pilot for an open-access EU-wide agricultural knowledge innovation system.

The expected impact of this network is to increase the uptake of the results and hence impact of TNs, through connecting them to each other and OGs within the EIP-AGRI and making a pilot for an open-access EU-wide agriculture and forestry database. This will contribute to bringing the research near to the practice and sharing innovative knowledge and best practices at the largest extent possible with farmers and foresters throughout the EU.

1.2. Objectives

The objective of writing a Policy Brief in cooperation with the Strategic Working Group of the Standing Committee on Agricultural Research on Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (SWG SCAR AKIS) was to co-create policy-recommendations built on the EURAKNOS outputs, in particular those from Work Package (WP) 2 (Recommendations of the Budapest workshop; Deliverable 2.5[1]). This Policy Brief on the sustainability of TNs is meant for decision-making and funding bodies; agricultural and rural development departments at national, regional, and local levels; as well as Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) networks and advisory groups that may influence policy making e.g., lobbying organizations, expert groups, farmers and advisory organizations, and technology platform developers. Based on the EURAKNOS WP2 work with TNs and the development of guidelines for building successful networks and best dissemination practices, this Policy Brief outlines recommendations specifically targeted at the above-mentioned policy and funding structures which can support and improve project outcomes, and linkages to other networks (e.g. local user networks), to ensure sustainability and hence impact.

2. Task members

Table 1. Partners involved in the different Tasks of WP5 (in bold "L" the task leaders).

Task	Partner																
	ACTA	IDELE	NAK	U-Gent	GLZ	USC	AU	PSKW	ARC	AUA	IFA	LFG	RAU	IFOAM-EU	EV ILVO	IFV	NAIK
5.1	L	X	X			X					X		X				
5.2		X	X			X		X			L		X				
5.3		X	X		X	X	L	X			X		X				
5.4	X	X	X	L			X*	X	X		X		X	X			
WP[1]			X							X		X*			X	X	X*

[1] budget not allocated to task
*no budget originally, but was involved after the amendment

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[1] Deliverable 2.5 – WP2. Report of EURAKNOS Workshop 1

3. Methodology

The Policy Brief was composed based on consultations (workshop sessions) with the SWG SCAR AKIS at their meeting on 19th – 20th of November 2019 in Kaunas, Lithuania. The consultations were based around recommendations from the EURAKNOS Knowledge Innovation Panel (KIP) workshop in Budapest in September 2019 (see Annex 1), in which 9 agriculture/forestry advisors, 2 consultants, 3 farmers/foresters, 2 policy makers and 17 researchers participated in addition to the EURAKNOS partners. Out of the total 20 recommendations from the Budapest workshop, a selection of 10 was made by the SWG SCAR AKIS members through email in preparation for the workshop in Kaunas. All SWG SCAR AKIS members had the opportunity to rank the recommendations according to their importance and relevance to the subject which ultimately resulted in a common top 10 to be discussed and further elaborated upon in the meeting. The participants at the SWG SCAR AKIS meeting were split up into 10 groups of approximately 5 participants to discuss the 10 recommendations and a rotation was done so that each group had the opportunity to give comments and inputs on each recommendation (see Annex 2). Policy makers of at least 11 Member States (Lithuania, Spain, Sweden, Netherlands, Germany, Finland, Slovenia, France, Hungary, Belgium, and Poland) were present, each of them giving input and taking key messages back to their home country and national, regional, and local networks.

The 10 recommendations were then regrouped into 6 main recommendations as a basis for a draft Policy Brief and sent to the SWG SCAR AKIS by mail for further input and consequently validation, since it was not possible to meet physically again in 2020 due to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Recommendations from the initial Policy Brief as well as from the vision paper[2] (Deliverable 5.8[3]), were presented at the online Nordic Baltic meeting on June 11, 2020. In total, 18 National Rural Networks (NRNs) were present from Finland, Sweden, Denmark (Managing Authority; NRN is part of the Ministry of Food, Agriculture & Fisheries), Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The discussion was led by the representative from the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) (Scotland).

The initial Policy Brief was also presented at two online meetings organized by the EURAKNOS team:

1. EURAKNOS: Raiders of the lost Agricultural Knowledge 5 February 2021
   Agenda:
   - The Explorer's Guide for Thematic Network Projects
   - Policy Recommendations to Support Thematic Network Function
   - Prototype online knowledge platform for agriculture and forestry

At this event, out of the > 50 participants not part of the EURAKNOS project, at least 8 were policy makers (not including the PO), representing REA, EIP-AGRI, Ministries and Chambers of Commerce (Italy, Belgium, France, Croatia).

2. From EURAKNOS to the EUREKA of European Knowledge Exchange 26 February 2021
   Agenda:
   - EURAKNOS achievements and results, building a bridge towards EUREKA
   - How to better integrate TNs in the Agricultural and Knowledge Innovation Systems (AKIS) and how can the TN community make use of EURAKNOS' outputs.

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[2] EURAKNOS Vision paper: Developing High Impact: The Future EU-wide Open Source Knowledge Reservoir for Agriculture and Forestry

[3] EURAKNOS Deliverable 5.8: Vision paper of the EURAKNOS strategic innovation board on high impact Knowledge Reservoirs

- How policy and funding structures can be adapted to better support the function and sustainability of TNs to achieve maximal impact.
  - For this session, 2 representatives of farmers/farmer organizations and 2 policymakers were invited to give their feedback: a representative from the Federation of Swedish Farmers, a member of the COPA-COCEGA; a representative of ZLTO (Dutch regional farmers association; a representative of the National Rural Network Support Unit (Ministry of Agriculture, Slovenia) who has worked a lot with rural development in national government; a policy officer at the European Commission (DG AGRI).

At this event, at least 5 participants identified themselves as policy makers in a Mentimeter questionnaire.

At both meetings, there was a lively debate about the Policy Brief. A summary of these debates is found below, with the 6 draft recommendations in bold and *comments from the EURAKNOS team in italics.*

General comments
Due to a slide in the presentation on the 5th of February (see fig. 3), which gave a simplified view of knowledge users vs. knowledge providers, there was a discussion about whether farmers and foresters are to be considered only as "users" of knowledge and not "providers" as well and vice versa, that advisors, teachers, students, policymakers and researchers will be "users" as well as "providers".

The Explorers' Guide (EURAKNOS 2020a) describes the role of farmers and foresters indeed as part of the co-creation process. In the Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS), all actors, including farmers and foresters, are co-sharing and co-creating knowledge and can as such equally be considered as knowledge users and providers. However, the farmers and foresters are the ones who will implement the knowledge best practices, and innovative solutions in the field, even if they also share it and are equally considered experts in the co-creation process or in the interactive innovation mode. In the slide below farmers and foresters are considered as the main user groups of TN outputs.
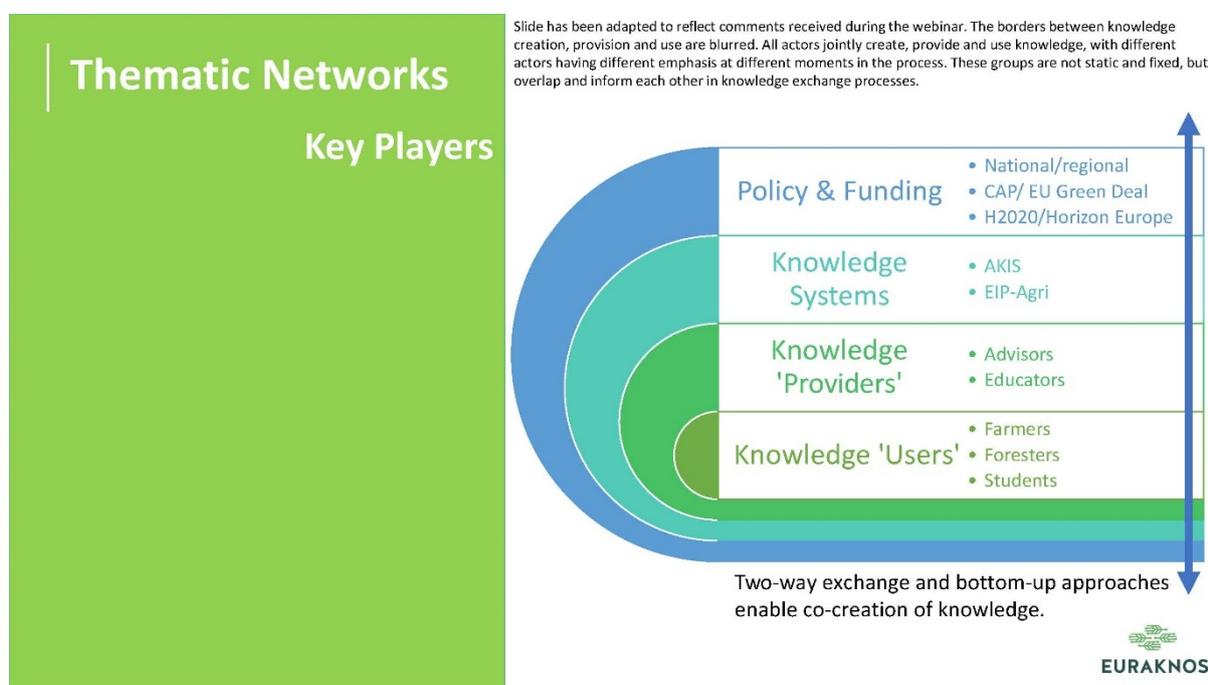

Figure 2: Updated slide from the presentation of Policy Brief following discussion

EURAKNOS

1. **Engagement of the user in the co-development, co-design, co-creation and co-sharing phase is key for the success of TNs:**

Funding schemes should provide extra financial incentives for farmers and foresters to participate in meetings, participatory activities or consultation rounds.

- Some participants confirmed the difficulty to get farmers and foresters involved in the conception phase/consortium/project participatory activities or events because they do not get paid for participation or for their time - they must leave their job and pay someone else to do it.
- Others argued that farmers and foresters need to have a personal interest to participate to increase adoption of the outcomes – they bring their knowledge and experience into play and so there are mutual benefits.
- This was supplemented with the argument that TNs do not want farmers to participate for the money but because they think they will benefit from participating – but often farmers find their daily work more urgent.
- Another suggestion was to cover the direct expenses of the farmers and foresters involved, expecting key producers to participate if they have a stake in the process and outcomes.
- Flexibility in terms of how to fund farmers and foresters was encouraged.
- When reimbursing farmers, a very important point: make it easy and simple for the farmers to get their funding without a lot of administration! This could be e.g., vouchers or a lump sum without any administration.
- Some participants pointed out that the best solution is to include a balanced mix of actors with complementary knowledge in the consortium from the conceptualisation phase, clearly activating farmers/foresters, farmers' groups and advisors.
- However, another option is to consider at the proposal stage how to involve them later, as there is flexibility for this -
- Funding for farmers may be found by involving OGs, and making the link with TNs stronger;
  - In the future, it will be possible to create cross-border OGs and TNs may grow from clusters of OGs on similar topics/themes
- Up to 50% of funding for OGs may be paid in advance;
- Article 72 (Common Agricultural Policy) sets provisions for networking, knowledge events, linking with education, advisory and innovation support which may contribute to integrating TNs into the AKIS.

2. **Responding to real and pressing needs of farmers and foresters is the basis of TN outputs:**

Funding schemes should allow TNs to be flexible and responsive to challenges that present themselves or develop over the project's lifetime.

- Pre-funding and the timing of national vs EU-funding can be problematic – at the start, TNs were started before any OGs existed.
- There should be a policy focus on all types of funding (CAP, Horizon Europe (HE), other types) working together and starting at the same time.
- The partners need to be clever to combine the use of separate funding sources.
- The funding schemes should be clear and simple.
- Some participants argued that funding was not the main question, but how to improve farmers' knowledge and adoption of this knowledge since a large amount of material exists.
- Others argued that H2020 funding is very flexible, you may either include some flexibility already in the application or if you find out you need flexibility later, you can use amendments. There was a reply to this that an amendment may take 12 months to get approved.

- There was also a question about the duration of TNs – some only last two years, but the best networks are lifelong; maybe TNs should be at least 5 years to get benefit from the community created within the TN framework; the same budget could be spread out over a longer lifespan;
  - A reply was that under Horizon Europe, TNs will be a minimum of 3 years and even this may be adapted to e.g. 4 years.
  - It could also be possible after three years to identify new challenges and together apply for a new project. Follow-up projects on the same theme/topic can enhance sustainability.
- Long-term funding requires effective governance, reflections on business models, and for the network to be kept relevant and dynamic.
- The sustainability of TNs can be increased through support in terms of facilitation of the network post-funding.
- People with the same interests will share knowledge, involve universities and farmers, meet on-farm and in different countries; OGs and TNs can also arise and/or continue spontaneously.
- Digital collaboration between TNs and OGs may also strengthen the AKIS at all levels (European, national, regional, and local).

3. **User friendly dissemination materials as a standard for successful uptake of results:**

Funding and intermediary agencies should develop and promote standardised dissemination formats which appeal to different TN target groups (farmers, foresters, advisors, educators in different agriculture and forestry sectors).
- Standards should be developed for Member States to improve interoperability between initiatives at national and other levels; these standards should be applied for the whole knowledge chain from research to practice (OGs).
- There may be a conflict between using standards e.g., "nice look" on the platform, and a "nice pdf" and what is automatically translatable (e.g., word).

4. **Integration of TN and other funded projects/activities in the AKIS at macro- and micro-levels, connection to long-term established networks:**

National, or regional and local governments should facilitate and financially support mapping of local (user) networks and main information sources for farmers and foresters.
- Cooperation and knowledge exchange cannot build only on funded network projects - projects can serve as accelerators for a particular issue but afterwards the networks should try to establish self-organized structures to achieve sustainability.
- It should be recognized that there are already existing networks such as farmer unions, how do they interact with e.g., TNs? Are they competing for the farmers' time?
- Also, many other existing knowledge systems and providers, institutes, and stakeholders, should be included as key players, not only the EU-funded framework.
- A suggestion was to have a recurring workshop involving researchers, advisors, OGs and ministries.

5. **Connection to education within the AKIS:**

Funding schemes should stimulate connection to (digital) training.
- COVID-19 has improved the digital standards on most farms; this may even increase the need for digital training.

- The recommendation about educating farmers (analogue users to digital literacy) may alienate them from participation in the project, as they should be involved from the beginning.
- Older farmers – as many European farmers are – may not be digitally skilled and thus may not be able to use the knowledge on the platform; they *may need an intermediary, e.g. an advisor who can consult the digital platform to help them decide which knowledge is relevant and how they can implement it.*

6. **Connection to the digital AKIS; digitalization of TN outputs in national and EU-wide open access platforms:**

National and/or regional government departments should help the sustainability of TN outcomes, not only by integrating TN outputs in a national or regional open access knowledge platform but also by promoting the creation and maintenance of a common EU-wide agricultural knowledge platform according to the FAIR principles[4].

- The CAP post 2020 needs an EU-wide knowledge reservoir to support the AKIS in the Member States.
- It is relevant to use the EU-wide agricultural knowledge platform for the new CAP network website and everyone can use it in their own countries and AKIS strategies. It would be sustainable.
- Regional/national AKIS strategies needed to be developed for knowledge reservoirs based on project outputs funded at the regional/national level to enhance knowledge sharing between all actors e.g., advisors need to be updated on recent research and innovation, e.g. through a digital platform.
  A digital platform should be combined with real life activities such as demonstration activities and face-to-face meetings; the platform can facilitate this as it will attract people, make them curious and find each other e.g. researchers planning a multi-actor project, who may have problems finding non-research partners for the project, may be able to do so on the platform;
- The solution for a practical problem (real need from the farmer/forester) needs to bring together all knowledge, not just knowledge from "official" sources. As such, the "knowledge ecosystem" should not be designed around the TNs but instead, the TNs and the platform integrated within the AKIS, in which all actors produce and use knowledge.
- It is difficult for researchers to know what the farmers need, but such a platform could be the link between practice and research.
- There was a question as to whether the platform should also in some way feed into the media, e.g., longer stories that could be featured in farmers' magazines, which would be appreciated when written by a trusted source. The platform could be connected to trusted traditional channels and also link to platforms and user networks at national and local levels.
- The knowledge provided should also take into account specific agroclimatic and socioeconomic conditions to the extent possible.

Based on these comments, the EURAKNOS team revised the Policy Brief to reflect the feedback.

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[4] Turning FAIR into reality (europa.eu)

EURAKNOS

3.1. Policy Brief

Sustainability of Thematic Networks for Agricultural and Forestry Innovation: Recommendations from the EURAKNOS Project

The EURAKNOS project (www.euraknos.eu) deals with the future of innovation in European agriculture and forestry based on the improved (digital) exchange of best practices between key actors in agricultural and forestry innovation from different sectors and EU Member States. Despite the continued funding of research projects at national and European level, the outcomes are often not integrated into agricultural and forestry practice, and innovative methods from practice are not captured and spread. Thematic Networks are remedying this. Thematic Networks are multi-actor projects which connect actors with interests and expertise centred around one theme in agriculture and/or forestry, based on real needs of farmers and foresters. They collect, summarize, share and present existing knowledge and best practices in easily understandable formats for users such as farmers, foresters, advisors, and other key intermediaries.

EURAKNOS has collaborated with Thematic Networks covering all kinds of agricultural and forestry-related themes to develop guidance for establishing and conducting further Thematic Network projects[5]. EURAKNOS is also developing a proof-of-concept for an agricultural knowledge platform as a precursor to a centralized system for long-term storage of Thematic Network outputs.

The role of Thematic Networks within the Agricultural European Innovation Partnership (EIP-AGRI) and Agricultural Knowledge Innovation Systems (AKIS)

The concept of Agriculture Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) is used to describe how people and organizations join together to promote mutual learning to generate, share, and use agriculture-related knowledge and information. A great diversity of actors is involved in sharing and creating agricultural knowledge. Farmers, foresters, advisors, researchers, education and training providers, input suppliers, retailers, media services, ministries, and others, are all part of a national or regional AKIS since they all either need, produce or exchange knowledge. In the interactive innovation model, Thematic Networks produce valuable outcomes that must be maintained for future use. Thematic Networks are coordinated actions in funding schemes designed to speed up the agriculture and forestry innovation process based on user needs and engagement. The sustainability of these networks and their outputs - practice-oriented knowledge for farmers and foresters - is key to achieving long-term visibility, wider reach, and increased impact of funded outcomes. Thematic Networks have been a key success as part of the EIP-AGRI and of the AKIS in countries, especially when connected to Operational Groups (OGs)[6].

Modernization of national strategic plans for the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) will require a stronger collaboration between researchers, advisors and CAP networks, and greater efforts in digitalization and education. To build a strong and well-functioning EU AKIS; better connectivity, quicker circulation of information, and intensive knowledge sharing is needed. Thematic Networks can play an important role in the exchange of information and knowledge between key actors in agricultural and forestry innovation at European, national and regional levels. Maintaining the outcomes of Thematic Networks within the AKIS beyond the funded project period, which is in general 3 years, is always a challenge. As the sustainability and legacy of Thematic Network projects is not guaranteed, the results of Thematic Networks may get lost at all levels in a relatively short time, hence losing their impact on agricultural and forestry innovation.

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[5] The EURAKNOS Explorer's Guide to Thematic Networks
[6] EIP-Agri: 7 years of innovation in agriculture and forestry

Policy recommendations to enhance the sustainability and impact of Thematic Networks

This Policy Brief provides a set of recommendations for policymakers, in particular decision-making and funding bodies; agricultural and rural development departments at national, regional, and local level; as well as CAP networks and advisory groups that may influence policy making, including lobbying organizations, expert groups, farmers, foresters and advisory organizations, and technology platform developers. The policy recommendations aim to contribute to the creation of an enabling environment for establishing Thematic Networks and ensuring their sustainability. Thematic Networks co-develop, co-design and deliver materials to support knowledge exchange activities (e.g., events, on-farm demonstrations, training, and education) and feed into Operational Groups and other (user) networks. The basis for this Policy Brief was developed through an interactive participatory and co-creative process with over 80 key actors in agricultural and forestry innovation, including government representatives of at least 17 Member States (Lithuania, Spain, Sweden, Netherlands, Germany, Finland, Slovenia, France, Hungary, Belgium, Poland, Romania, Portugal, Italy, Latvia, Estonia and Ireland). Discussions took place during the meeting of the Strategic Working Group of the Standing Committee on Agricultural Research on Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (SWG SCAR AKIS) in Kaunas (19-20 November 2019). The ten recommendations explored during the meeting were based upon the summary of previous results from the EURAKNOS expert workshop in Budapest[7] (11-13 September 2019).

This process resulted in six main recommendations which can be supported through adapted decision-making and funding frameworks at EU, national, regional, and local levels:

1. **Engagement of the user in the co-development, co-design, co-creation, and co-sharing phase is key for the success of Thematic Networks:**

    Funding schemes should provide extra financial incentives for farmers and foresters to participate in meetings, participatory activities or consultation rounds. This will facilitate the engagement of farmers and foresters in a bottom-up approach **during the pre-funding phase and throughout project implementation** to ensure the Thematic Network effectively addresses the needs of the users. This funding should be flexible, to be used at any stage of the project, including the conceptualisation stage. Claiming the funding must be simple with minimal administration required (e.g., vouchers or a lump sum covering the practitioner's time and/or direct expenses required to participate). In addition, to increase the involvement of farmers and/or foresters in TNs, strong links should be made with local networks and OGs.

2. **Responding to real and pressing needs of farmers and foresters is the basis for Thematic Network outputs:**

    Funding schemes should be clear, simple and allow Thematic Networks to be flexible and responsive to challenges that present themselves or develop over the project's lifetime. The funding framework should enforce addressing the *current* needs of farmers and foresters. **Flexibility is helpful as social, economic, regulatory, and environmental needs may shift from those identified at the beginning of the funding phase.** In addition, funding schemes should allow for the combination of various types/sources of funding (e.g. within the Common Agricultural Policy, Horizon Europe and other schemes at regional and national level) to create synergy and strengthen projects' effectiveness and impact at social, economic and environmental levels.

3. **User-friendly dissemination materials as a standard for successful uptake of results:**

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[7] EURAKNOS Deliverable 2.5 – WP2. Report of EURAKNOS Workshop 1

Funding and intermediary agencies should develop and promote standardised dissemination formats which appeal to different Thematic Network target groups (farmers, foresters, advisors, educators in different agricultural and forestry sectors). The concept of the EIP-AGRI practice abstract should be expanded to incorporate more diverse outputs tailored to different user profiles. Visual materials such as videos presented by farmers or foresters in local languages, and well-designed presentations and infographics can increase the attractiveness, visibility and impact of Thematic Network results. When adapted to specific target groups they will be more easily applied by different user groups in different socio-economic and cultural contexts (farmers and foresters in practice, and advisors/innovation support services and educators as key intermediaries). Standards should be developed for Member States to improve digital interoperability between initiatives at national level; these standards should be applied for the whole knowledge chain from research to practice (i.e., Operational Groups). The standards should also consider aspects to enhance the user friendliness and accessibility of materials e.g., formats should be used that offer attractive design and aesthetic options whilst also being easily automatically translated into local languages.

4. **Better Thematic Network integration within the Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS) at macro- and micro-levels, including connection to long-term established networks:**
   National, or regional and local governments should facilitate and financially support mapping of local (user) networks and the main information sources for farmers and foresters. Identifying and collaborating with existing networks, information sources, connections and support mechanisms used by farmers and foresters allows Thematic Network outcomes to be transmitted by these trusted 'long-term established networks'. Cross border interaction between local networks and/or Operational Groups should be strongly encouraged as Thematic Networks on specific topics that are based on the real needs of the participating farmers and foresters may arise. This increases the credibility of Thematic Networks, ensures a broader reach and uptake of their results, and thus increases impact.

5. **Connection to education within the Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS):**
   Funding schemes should stimulate connection to (digital) training. The COVID 19 pandemic has confronted us with unprecedented challenges, increased the need for digital training and simultaneously has spurred the digital innovation and improved digital standardization on many farms. However, to maximize the reach to the broad demographic of farmers and foresters, **Thematic Networks should target key intermediaries, such as advisors and innovation brokers, to help 'analogue users' to increase their digital literacy via training and support.** This would enable those users to access online information resources and communities for peer-to-peer knowledge sharing. Local authorities, with support from key agricultural and forestry actors, should stimulate Thematic Networks in linking with educational initiatives, training platforms, discussion groups, demonstrations, or face-to-face meetings through funding schemes.

6. **Connection to the digital Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS); digitalization of Thematic Network outputs in national and EU-wide open access platforms:**
   National and/or regional government departments should help the sustainability of Thematic Network outcomes, not only by integrating them into a national or regional open access knowledge platform, but also by promoting the creation and maintenance of a common EU-wide agricultural knowledge platform according to the FAIR principles[8]. Digital

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[8] Turning FAIR into reality (europa.eu)

collaboration between Thematic Networks and Operational Groups and the different actors within the European AKIS should be enhanced. A key element to support this aim is the development of a common, EU-wide, standardized, and interoperable digital platform for co-sharing practice-oriented materials and other relevant knowledge for sustainable innovation in agriculture and forestry. This will strengthen the integration of Thematic Networks and Operational Groups within the AKIS and strengthen the AKIS at all levels (European, national, regional, and local). This platform would serve to connect different actors, initiatives and (CAP and other) networks at local, national, or European levels to combine the outputs of different projects[9] and bridge the gap between research and practice. Target users could easily find information in one place, resulting in higher web traffic compared to individual project websites. It is essential that the platform is well-maintained and adapts to user needs and expectations, including the use of local languages. Regional and national AKIS strategies need to be further developed to support digital knowledge reservoirs based on outputs from projects funded at the regional/national level to enhance knowledge sharing and link to the EU-wide platform. A digital platform should be combined with real life activities such as demonstration activities and face-to-face meetings, and link to trusted traditional channels such as agricultural magazines and local user networks.

4. Conclusion

TN structure, governance, and financing should be adapted to enhance the sustainability of TNs and their outcomes.

Six policy recommendations pertaining to the different aspects of the sustainability of TNs have been filed based on the work of WP2, including a multi-actor participatory workshop (Budapest, 2019), and a workshop with the SCAR AKIS SWG (WP5), and discussions at two participatory online meetings.

In short, the six recommendations are:

1. Engagement of the user in the co-development, co-design, co-creation and co-sharing phase is key for the success of TNs: ***Funding schemes should provide extra financial incentives for farmers and foresters to participate in meetings, participatory activities and consultation rounds.***
2. Responding to real and pressing needs of farmers and foresters are the basis TN outputs: ***Funding schemes should be clear and simple and at the same time allow TNs to be flexible and responsive to challenges that present themselves or develop over the project's lifetime.***
3. User friendly dissemination materials as a standard for successful uptake of results: ***Funding and intermediary agencies should develop and promote standardised dissemination formats which appeal to different TN target groups (farmers, foresters, advisors, educators in different agriculture and forestry sectors).***
4. Integration in the AKIS at macro- and micro-level, connection to long-term established networks: ***National, or regional and local governments should facilitate and financially support mapping of local (user) networks and main information sources for farmers and foresters.***
5. Connection to education within the AKIS: funding schemes should stimulate connection to (digital) training: ***TNs should target key intermediaries, such as advisors and innovation brokers, to help 'analogue users' to increase their digital literacy via training and support.***

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[9] EURAKNOS Vision paper: Developing High Impact: The Future EU-wide Open-Source Knowledge Reservoir for Agriculture and Forestry

6. Connection to the digital AKIS; digitalization of TN outputs in national and EU-wide open access platforms: ***National and/or regional government departments should help the sustainability of TN outcomes, not only by integrating TN outputs in a national or regional open access knowledge platform but also by promoting the creation and maintenance of a common EU-wide agricultural knowledge platform according to the FAIR principles[10].***

Thematic Networks strengthen the European Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS) by creating synergy at European, national, regional, and local levels.
The sustainability and impact of Thematic Networks and their outcomes can be significantly enhanced by implementing these recommendations at several levels: local, regional, national, and European. The six recommendations mentioned above can serve as guidelines for policy makers and funders at national and European levels to improve the form, function, and outputs of Thematic Networks and secure their sustainability, legacy, and impact beyond the funded project period.

These six criteria and recommendations identified by key actors in the EU and national AKIS indicate that Thematic Network projects need greater support from the European Commission, as well as government departments and funding agencies at the national level. Thematic Networks and their outputs should also be more intensively used by national, regional, and local governments and aligned to other initiatives and networks to achieve greater sustainability and have a greater impact on agriculture and forestry innovation.

Thematic Networks, be it at the EU, national or regional level, are a key instrument to improve Member States' AKIS, as part of their Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) AKIS strategy[11]. To ensure sustainability Thematic Networks should make better use of national and other local networks to maximize the engagement of key AKIS actors in participatory activities related to specific thematic fields on the one hand and to maximize the dissemination and exploitation of outcomes on the other. Through the implementation of these recommendations, Thematic Network projects will also respond better to the needs of farmers and foresters, enhance uptake of results by a wider community of users over a longer timeframe, and be more sustainable, ultimately accelerating innovation in agriculture and forestry. Funding programmes and frameworks should be adapted to facilitate interaction between different actors and local (user) networks to better address user needs and stimulate the adaptation of new knowledge, innovative solution, and best practices in support of the Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS). This would ultimately make Thematic Networks more efficient and impactful at regional, national, and European levels.

To achieve this, policy makers and decision-makers at all levels (EU, national, regional and local) should adapt the project structure and funding requirements for calls to improve the interaction between different actors and networks. The budget should be diverted from the variety of project websites, which are often not sufficiently known, to a common standardized and interoperable digital platform that connects to multiple actors, including educational institutions. An enabling environment, supporting the digital AKIS and facilitating synergy, will make Thematic Networks more efficient, sustainable, and impactful, improving the information flow and sharing of knowledge between key actors in the AKIS at European and national levels.

5. Perspectives

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[10] Turning FAIR into reality (europa.eu)
[11] SWG SCAR AKIS: Preparing for future AKIS in Europe. Page 29

The final Policy Brief on sustainability of TNs was made available on the EURAKNOS website and the Horizon Results Platform. The recommendations will serve for future work with TNs at European, regional, national and local levels. The Policy Brief is one of the Key Exploitable Results (KERs) of the EURAKNOS project so will be readily used by partners in in the post-project phase to support relevant activities.

In the next step funding agencies can use these guidelines to improve the core of TNs, their impact and sustainability. The recommendations may also be useful to strengthen the agricultural European Innovation Partnership (EIP-AGRI) in boosting the participation of farmers and foresters, providing a flexible TN roadmap, and fostering the integration with OGs. They will also feed into projects and networks that specifically aim to strengthen the interaction between the key actors of the AKIS such as LIAISON[12], AGRILINK,[13] EUREKA[14], and CAP networks, but also in other multi-actor projects and co-innovation platforms that bring several public and private actors together with strong user engagement in frame of sustainable agriculture and forestry innovation.

Besides the dissemination through the EURAKNOS website, the partners of the consortium will also ensure the continuation of the dissemination of the policy recommendations through their websites and networks to support exploitation. For example, EURAKNOS results, including the policy recommendations, will also feed into an FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) project with the Ministry of Agriculture of Tunisia (TCP/TUN/3704, Projet mise en place d'un partneriat public-privé en matière de vulgarization Agricole, vers un modèle pour la promotion d'un système de Services de Vulgarisation Agricole et Conseil (SVAC) en Tunisie).

Also, in future events the policy recommendations will be presented by the EURAKNOS team and networks of the SWG SCAR AKIS members. The policy paper is also uploaded in the Horizon Results platform to reach other policy makers and funding agencies to the furthest extent possible.

6. Recommended Reading

Thematic networks – Closing the research and innovation divide:
https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/en/about/thematic-networks-%E2%80%93-closing-research-and

EIP-AGRI Brochure on Thematic Networks under Horizon 2020:
https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/en/publications/eip-agri-brochure-thematic-networks-under-horizon

EIP-AGRI Seminar 'CAP Strategic Plans: the key role of AKIS in Member States:
https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/en/event/eip-agri-seminar-cap-strategic-plans-key-role-akis

The agricultural European Innovation Partnership
https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/

SCAR Strategic Working Group on Agricultural Innovation and Knowledge Systems (AKIS)
https://scar-europe.org/index.php/akis

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[12] LIAISON2020 | Optimizing interactive innovation
[13] AgriLink Home - AgriLink (agrilink2020.eu)
[14] www.h2020eureka.eu

7. Annex I: 20 recommendations from the EURAKNOS meeting in Budapest, September 2019

The **20 recommendations** below are distilled from the various parallel workshops that were organized during the EURAKNOS Thematic Network (TN) expert meeting in Budapest, September 2019. Check the video summary from the meeting and the testimonials on the value proposition of EURAKNOS.

The recommendations are listed in process order, starting with the conceptualization and initiation phase of a TN project up until the finalization. Color coded links are made in relation to the four main aspects of TNs that are investigated in EURAKNOS. Where possible some case examples of TNs are also given to illustrate the recommendations.

TN content (creation of outputs)
TN content storage (how outputs are stored)
TN Communication & Dissemination (uptake and promotion of outputs)
TN multi-actor approach (who involved and how)

1. TN Purpose:
    The TN should have a **clear and narrow focus** on the problem it wants to solve within a certain sector **by** asking end users the right questions in order to **understand and address the needs, problems, preferences and barriers of end users. For TNs to address end users' needs it is imperative they are involved from the conceptualization phase**. In the true spirit of co-creation and the co-innovation model in Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS), **the TN ceases to talk about end users**, but will consider all involved actors as partners or knowledge producers who can mutually learn from each other (TN content + TN multi-actor approach + TN Communication & Dissemination).
    This bottom-up approach that a TN can use to better elucidate user (farmer/forester/advisor) needs, is vital to **build trust** with and between them **in the initiation phase.** There are several strategies for doing this (these different strategies are best combined):

    A. The first strategy is to **involve 'end users' in the partnership of the consortium**. This implies that they should already be actively involved in the proposal writing phase when the project concept and methodology are conceived.
    B. The second strategy is to **organize workshops or scoping seminars with 'end users'** at the start of the project. This can be best done by involving local networks, linking with existing operational groups (OGs) or starting new OGs; using multipliers (farm extension services or cooperatives) or by setting up regional nodes as local hubs to meet TN partners and facilitate the sharing of needs, information and potential solutions.
    C. The third strategy is to **organize face-to-face (F2F) interviews or perform large-scale consultations or surveys** through existing regional or local networks or channels, e.g. existing farmer consulting systems.

    E.g. AgriSpin (Deliverable 1.5) used an innovative storytelling strategy. They started by asking all partners of the consortium to write a story about a farm innovation that they were working on, their role, the journey they had taken so far and the lessons they had learned in their own words. Next they also collected the dreams of participants during F2F workshops.

2. TN State Of The Art:
    The TN should also have or gather an **extensive overview of what** content **already exists (relevant state of the art) in relation to the subject it will deal with and the TN should know how it will**

utilize the existing coordination and support measures to apply, add value and go beyond the existing body of knowledge. This phase enables the TN to decide whether there is enough knowledge and expertise within the TN, or whether they need to do more preparatory work or engage other experts (see 3) (TN content).

3. TN Roadmap:
   The TN should have a **flexible roadmap towards the outputs** (e.g. solutions to certain problems) the TN wants to develop, trial and apply. It should **co-create** these outputs **with the best experts** that are required to solve the problems the TN has identified. Once the TN has gathered an overview of knowledge (as described in 2) a TN may identify that external expert knowledge is required. Here **'end users' and enablers (facilitators) should** work together with experts to develop potential outputs and ensure the user friendliness and feasibility of the outputs that are being developed. For example, a TN may identify that they need **different actors** to create an enabling environment **for the actual implementation or upscaling of an output**, such as proper regulation or value chain cooperation. If needed, the **TN should allow actors to flexibly adapt their role in the TN** as the project matures. The TN provides a **2-way knowledge exchange** between all of the involved actors (TN multi-actor approach).

4. TN Culture:
   It is very important to establish and maintain a good alignment of all actors towards the shared goal(s) of the TN. This is the responsibility of the coordinator, but a facilitator can help to make sure that all involved actors have a **clear view on the process, the intermediate steps and their role within the process**. In the beginning of the project, this should be translated in some sort of TN 'Code Of Conduct' or rules of engagement to clearly spell out expectations, roles and governance during the trust building phase. Moreover, additional resources should be available to create a culture of trust within a TN through team building exercises to enforce the 'Code Of Conduct' (TN multi-actor approach).

5. TN Facilitation:
   The co-creation process should be **facilitated by facilitators with sufficient expertise only.** The facilitator does not need to be an expert in the field of enquiry but must have or build a trusting, respectful relationship with the TN. The role of the facilitator is to guide the TN through the co-creation process, keeping all actors motivated and working together towards their common goal(s). The facilitator's role is also to help the TN recognize when and what external support or different actors are required. The facilitator should have strong soft & process skills and be able to adapt to the needs of the TN. For example, a newly formed TN may require more directive facilitation to begin with, compared to an established TN which is more self-driven. A facilitator therefore needs to demonstrate competence in facilitating multi-actor knowledge exchange and the ability to reflect and adjust their approach as the TN evolves. The facilitator should map the needs, drivers and competencies of each actor and identify roles which play to their strengths and facilitate the sharing of knowledge and skills between actors (TN multi-actor approach).

6. TN Structure:
   In addition, the TN should have a **multi-layered structure** in the network taking into account the **local, national, cross-regional and EU level from start to finish** in order to create **impact at all levels**. There should be dynamic links at the national/EU-level with regular meetings to facilitate communication between each level and overall coordination. Each participating member state should be represented by a consortium partner (TN multi-actor approach).

7. TN Content:
   The **outputs** that the TN produces should be **based on practical expertise** that can motivate farmers to apply or further innovate to tackle technological, economic and ecological problems.

The solutions should have clear targets and user profiles (and expertise level) for the problems they are trying to solve and they should be **embedded in everyday farming practice.** The role of a TN is (I) to create and share timely practice solutions by leveraging existing knowledge to technological, economic and ecological problems; and (II) to inspire other 'end users' and actors to mobilize new TNs or other Multi-actor projects (MAPs) to trial, innovate and apply their own practical solutions to context specific problems (TN content).

8. TN Digital Platform:
The **digital platform** that houses the TNs knowledge outputs should function so that the content shown to each user is **profile user led, i.e. tailored to their profile, level of expertise and in their preferred language and format** (automatic profiling and translation). This should be organized using common easy language with well-defined concepts and focus (instead of using over-generalized buzzwords). Having a digital platform which responds to each user creates trust and validity in the platform, which can amplify the number of users it reaches and the impact it gains (TN content storage + TN content + TN multi-actor approach + TN Communication & Dissemination).

9. TN User Interaction:
In addition, the digital platform should **use user analytics** to further optimize its usability, including **evaluation and feedback forms** on the solutions and outputs it generates. For example, via user reviews of content, content suggestions (e.g. Amazon function: '*user that were interested in this were also interested in these alternatives'*) or a 'bot' that flags up other information that is relevant for you in an interactive virtual conversation (Q&A). This would facilitate a live, interactive experience for the user and enable the TN **to improve the outputs and adapt them**, so they stay relevant (see the iterative spiral from the 'Community of Practice') (TN content storage + TN content + TN multi-actor approach + TN Communication & Dissemination).
E.g. 4D4F, measured outreach with user analytics in a learning community
E.g. FarmDemo hub that was set up by AgriDemo-F2F, PLAID and Nefertiti uses questions, instead of keywords or categories to guide the users to the results that are most relevant for them.

10. Access to TN Output:
The **digital platform** that houses the TN outputs should provide **easy access** to content through an **optimized search engine** with highly configurable, state-of-the-art search engine technology. In addition, a cross-platform with cross-device applications, such as a user-friendly mobile application for daily use, should be explored. All **content need to be relevant, to the point and instantly provide value to the user**. Therefore, the content should be easily searchable and findable (TN content storage).
As such, digital platforms of TNs should at least adopt the following **features to filter information** (high signal to noise ratio within a max of 5 clicks):

A. A good categorization with keywords or "Search Zones" i.e. the existence of specific "areas" on a webpage allowing for guided content search through use of predefined options (geography, sectors, themes, needs, expertise, solutions, content type, origin, date, etc.) when you want to browse and be inspired.
B. Intuitive and efficient search tools (similar to those that most people use every day provided by major tech firms) when you want to find specifically what you are looking for.

11. <u>TN Output Standardisation:</u>
The outputs of a TN have a **degree of standardization**, including descriptors and metadata provided by well-established and acknowledged vocabulary, going from tailor-made solutions to highly standardized content depending on who the output is for (TN content storage).

12. <u>TN Community Of Practice:</u>
The TN should build and grow an **interactive 'Community of Practice'** that can refine the solutions and enhance the uptake **in an iterative learning spiral by creating regional pilots and by A/B testing in different regions** to take into account regional differences. The TN can build this community from scratch or it can try to involve and leverage existing communities (e.g. farmer networks, cooperatives, NGOs,…). It is the facilitators role to recognize that an existing community may have very different needs compared to a newly established community and to adjust the approach accordingly. The TN will assign equal weight to the ideas and input from all members of the network, asking questions of end users and valuing everyone's input, regardless of perceived status. Again the facilitators role is to make sure that everyone is able to contribute to the direction of travel of the TN (TN multi-actor approach + TN Communication & Dissemination). *E.g. <u>SKIN</u> has developed an online platform for the implementation of a Virtual Community of Practice "Keep it short", in order to support the existing network and expand it with new end users, but also to exchange news, experiences and ensure the sustainability of the SKIN outputs.*

13. <u>TN Assets Leveraging:</u>
Local and well established existing networks (e.g. National Rural Networks (NRNs) or OGs), **channels** (e.g. media contacts, news outlets or farmer organizations), **meetings and activities should be used** as much as possible for getting relevant input and organizing end user communication and dissemination activities. Farmers & foresters only interact and take up information from materials, channels and people they trust. This also includes other farmers they respect in their community. Therefore, a **mapping exercise to identify the resources which farmers are using and their existing connections and support mechanisms for TNs is vital to ensure uptake of new information within the TN and wider dissemination throughout the farming community** (TN Communication & Dissemination).

14. <u>TN Digital Support:</u>
The TN should provide **digital support structures** that allow to **share problems, expertise, solutions and** that can **bring actors together**. This should be done **in an engaging and interactive fashion**, e.g. via a chat forum, WebTV with videos or podcasts to engage young potential farmers and allow farmers to ask each other for help and facilitate questions and sharing of knowledge between users. Potentially, this could be built or interact with existing social media platforms, like Facebook, Instagram or Reddit (e.g. Olivipedia) (TN content storage + TN multi-actor approach + TN Communication & Dissemination).

15. <u>TN Training:</u>
Nonetheless, the TN should also target 'analogue users' and increase the digital literacy of their 'end users' via **training/support**. The use of **professional teachers or links to a known and trusted education or training platform** can be an added value. It may also be effective to introduce 'analogue users' to digital platforms via traditional forms of knowledge exchange, such as discussion groups or F2F dissemination meetings. Here, the value and benefits of digital platforms can be established as a means of bringing this community back together online (TN Communication & Dissemination).

16. <u>TN Peer-To-Peer Exchange:</u>
The TN should take into account the **innovation adaptation curve** (innovator > early adopter > majority > laggards) and spend the majority of their focus on those 'end users' they can reach that act as **influencers** for the others (80/20-rule). As such, it should have a clear strategy with support tools to leverage this knowledge transfer effect and allow farmers to communicate more with other farmers and exchange ideas via **F2F meetings and cross-visits.** Elements of gamification or organizing an award can also be useful (TN Communication & Dissemination).
E.g. <u>Newbie</u> award for new entrant business models as inspiration for other farmers.

17. <u>TN Output Format:</u>
In terms of the format, materials, and tools used for dissemination purposes, **the less text and more visual and interactive the better**. So, there should be a focus on creating **engaging videos of best practices or case examples** with co-created content and international showcases of new information (TN Communication & Dissemination).

18. <u>TN Separate Communication & Dissemination:</u>
In order to maximize their impact TNs should have a **clear understanding of the difference between communication & dissemination** (the latter only being focused on promoting the uptake of results). In addition, they should have **separate plans**, tailored and targeted to specific audiences, **with separate monitoring systems** during and after the project execution in place to evaluate their outreach, the usefulness of their outputs, the actual uptake of results and to **estimate their direct and indirect impact** whenever possible (TN content + TN Communication & Dissemination).
E.g. <u>Agridemo-F2F</u> did try to analyze impact by doing telephone interviews 6 months after the demos.

19. <u>TN Resources Dissemination:</u>
A major part of the budget and resource allocation should be spent on actual **dissemination.** Potentially even adding a separate project on this **after the project has ended**. This is to maximize the impact of outputs created during the original TN project timeline to benefit the wider farming community. Resources and (financial) incentives to engage 'end users' are needed and to connect local OGs across members states in a peer-to-peer fashion (TN Communication & Dissemination).

20. <u>TN Sustainability:</u>
The TN should be sustainable and ensure that the **project results stay available** for the intended target audiences and beyond, even after the project has ended. In addition, it should allow actors within the network to stay connected. This could be facilitated by an online digital platform, or the continuation of meetings organized by the network themselves where they rotate the role of the facilitator. Therefore, TNs need to address this point (the sustainability of the network) including matters related to governance and financing already during the lifetime of the TN (TN content storage).

8. Annex II: Feedback from SCAR SWG AKIS on recommendations from the EURAKNOS meeting in Budapest

The **20 recommendations** below are distilled from the various parallel workshops that were organized during the EURAKNOS Thematic Network (TN) expert meeting in Budapest, September 2019. From these the 10 most important were selected according to the SCAR AKIS members and other participants who were present at the SCAR AKIS meeting in Kaunas. Small groups were formed linked to each participant her/his top 3 recommendations to further develop and improve one recommendation/group by answering several questions.

The top 10 recommendations are listed in order of importance according to the SCAR AKIS members. Color coded links are made in relation to the four main aspects of TNs that are investigated in EURAKNOS. Where possible some case examples of TNs are also given to illustrate the recommendations.

TN content (creation of outputs)
TN content storage (how outputs are stored)
TN Communication & Dissemination (uptake and promotion of outputs)
TN multi-actor approach (who involved and how)

1. TN Facilitation

The co-creation process should be **facilitated by expert facilitators only.** The facilitator does not need to be an expert in the field of enquiry but must have or build a trusting, respectful relationship with the TN. The role of the facilitator is to guide the TN through the co-creation process, keeping all actors motivated and working together towards their common goal(s). The facilitators role is also to help the TN recognize when and what external support or different actors are required. The facilitator should have strong soft skills and be able to adapt to the needs of the TN. For example, a newly formed TN may require more directive facilitation to begin with, compared to an established TN which is more self-driven. A facilitator therefore needs to demonstrate competence in facilitating multi-actor knowledge exchange and the ability to reflect and adjust their approach as the TN evolves. The facilitator should map the needs, drivers and competencies of each actor and identify roles which play to their strengths and facilitate the sharing of knowledge and skills between actors (TN multi-actor approach).

How can your team improve this recommendation?

- A facilitator has to be an equal partner of the team, from the beginning to the end.
- A facilitator needs good listening skills, like a journalist (LSD: Listening, Summarizing, Door vragen = Ask more).
- A facilitator also needs to have a good understanding of the subject matter. However, the facilitator steers at the process-level and not at the content-level.
- A training courses is needed for facilitators (see project I2Connect).
- A facilitator must be able to create multi-actor networks.
- There is a need to create a mandate for the facilitator within the network (often these are not there) and recognition and awareness on the mandate among all the project partners. This can be difficult to do at the start, because you encounter a chicken-or-egg problem: you need cooperation to be a good facilitator and demonstrate your competence, but you often only get this after you have proven yourself as a good facilitator.

How did/would you try to implement this recommendation?

- From the start a good analysis is needed of the problem, what is needed and who is required: what, how and who.

How can we measure/determine the success of this implementation?

- Use the approach of learning histories (Kiener and Roth): follow the story of the education process and the journey of the thematic network (story of the hero: assumptions at the start, questions, surprises and challenges the network overcame), as opposed to only documenting and promoting the final results.
- Focus on qualitative analysis rather than quantitative analysis (checkboxes).

How can policy help you implement this recommendation?

- Money of course. Farmers will not pay for facilitation processes, so policy needs to recognize the role for the facilitator and allocate budget accordingly.
- Incentives.
- Policy makers facilitating the facilitators.
- Creating good conditions.

2. TN Peer-To-Peer Exchange

The TN should take into account the **innovation adaptation curve** (innovator > early adopter > majority > laggards) and spend the majority of their focus on those 'end users' they can reach that act as **influencers** for the others (80/20-rule). As such, it should have a clear strategy with support tools to leverage this knowledge transfer effect and allow farmers to communicate more with other farmers and exchange ideas via **F2F meetings and cross-visits.** Elements of gamification or organizing an award can also be useful (TN Communication & Dissemination).

E.g. Newbie award for new entrant business models as inspiration for other farmers.

How can your team improve this recommendation?

- Listen, care, talk
- Group freedom to choose the topics and how they want to tackle it.
- Socialization and team building is also important and need to be funded.
- Demonstration is also a very powerful tool.
- Engage and support early adopters (founders, advisors) who will help spread innovation.

How did/would you try to implement this recommendation?

- Identify and notify early adopters via existing networks in established groups and in new groups that are geographically close to farmers and end users (small travel time).
- Facilitators should manage the groups.
- Allow testing (failures) innovation and learn from them.

How can we measure/determine the success of this implementation?

- Number of (new) groups
- Number of adopters

- As a quality measure come back after several weeks/years to see if the group is still operational

How can policy help you implement this recommendation?

- Rural development funding
- CAP flexibility (long term funding - more than 7 years)
- Combined and compatible funding (mix national and EU funding)
- Key elements for facilitators

3. TN Purpose

The ideal TN should have a **clear and narrow focus** on the problem it wants to solve within a certain sector **by** asking end users the right questions in order to **understand and address the needs, problems, preferences and barriers of end users. For TNs to address end users needs it is imperative they are involved from the conceptualization phase**. In the true spirit of co-creation and the co-innovation model in Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS), **the ideal TN ceases to talk about end users**, but will consider all involved actors as partners or knowledge producers who can mutually learn from each other (TN content + TN multi-actor approach + TN Communication & Dissemination).

This bottom-up approach that a TN can use to better elucidate user (farmer/forester/advisor) needs, is vital to **build trust** with and between them **in the initiation phase.** There are several strategies for doing this (these different strategies may be used simultaneously):

A. The first strategy is to **involve 'end users' in the partnership of the consortium**. This implies that they should already be actively involved in the proposal writing phase when the project concept and methodology are conceived.
B. The second strategy is to **organize workshops or scoping seminars with 'end users'** at the start of the project. This can be best done by involving local networks, linking with existing operational groups (OGs) or starting new OGs; using multipliers (farm extension services or cooperatives) or by setting up regional nodes as local hubs to meet TN partners and facilitate the sharing of needs, information and potential solutions.
C. The third strategy is to **organize face-to-face (F2F) interviews or perform large-scale consultations or surveys** through existing regional or local networks or channels, e.g. existing farmer consulting systems.

E.g. AgriSpin (Deliverable 1.5) used an innovative storytelling strategy. They started by asking all partners of the consortium to write a story about a farm innovation that they were working on, their role, the journey they had taken so far and the lessons they had learned in their own words. Next they also collected the dreams of participants during F2F workshops.

How can your team improve this recommendation?

- Very important to keep a clear and narrow focus for the thematic network, which is welcomed by the end users.
- Bottom-up approach: identifying and involving actors as an evolutionary process, so you always have the correct people at the table.
- Some homework in advance: actor analysis - preparatory stage identify farmers organization to help you get the right people in the group, arrange personal meeting and connect these into a group.
- Ask end users and actors to complete the group.

- Actors in the group can also invite additional stakeholders to become actors in the group if additional expertise is needed.

How did/would you try to implement this recommendation?

- The broker is key and he should at least be an expert in communication to ask: What do you want? What is the problem you want to solve? What is your ideal future?
- First you need to be clear on the what to do before you decide on how you want to it?

How can we measure/determine the success of this implementation?

- Measure the activity on the platforms and channels: communication / website / social media
- Check if you reached a common understanding with the group: ask individual feedback and if you see all actors give the exact same message, they are aligned. If not, you have some more work to do.

How can policy help you implement this recommendation?

- Group can give suggestions on both carrots and sticks:
  - \+ Supportive policy: admin simplification, tax reduction, eco-scheme in the CAP
  - \- Pressure
  - \- Limits

4. TN Roadmap

The ideal TN should have a **flexible roadmap towards the solutions** the TN wants to develop, trial and apply. It should **co-create** these solutions **with the best experts** that are required to solve the problems the TN has identified. Once the TN has gathered an overview of knowledge (as described in 2) a TN may identify that external expert knowledge is required. Here **'end users' and enablers (facilitators) should** work together with experts to develop potential solutions and ensure the user friendliness and feasibility of the solutions that are being developed. For example, a TN may identify that they need **different actors** to create an enabling environment **for the actual implementation or upscaling of a solution**, such as proper regulation or value chain cooperation. If needed, the **TN should allow actors to flexibly adapt their role in the TN** as the project matures. The ideal TN provides a **2-way knowledge exchange** between all of the involved actors (TN multi-actor approach).

How can your team improve this recommendation?

- Simplify the text - stick to a lightened recommendation.
- Focus on the goal, rather than activities.
- Make roadmap simple and flexible.
- Focus on impact.

How did/would you try to implement this recommendation?

- Use flexible working programmes.
- Learn from past experience in the first years of the project.
- If possible, an inspiring story.

How can we measure/determine the success of this implementation?

- Monitor goals, activities, (quality) indicators.

- A funded preliminary phase and iterative improvement with external (end user) feedback and iterative budget allocation in phases after each validation step.

How can policy help you implement this recommendation?

- Policies/regulations need to allow flexible WP.
- Too much ex ante education.

5. TN Content

The **outputs** that the ideal TN produces should be **based on practical expertise** that can inspire farmers to apply or further innovate to tackle technological, economic and ecological problems. The solutions should have clear targets and user profiles (and expertise level) for the problems they are trying to solve and they should be **embedded in everyday farming practice.** The role of a TN is twofold: (I) to create and share timely practice solutions to technological, economic and ecological problems; and (II) to inspire other 'end users' and actors to mobilize new TNs to trial, innovate and apply their own practical solutions to context specific problems (TN content).

How can your team improve this recommendation?

- Also produce content for small-scale farmers.
- A lot of farmers, public and private advisors have not yet heard about EIP-AGRI, so TNs should also try to reach them (go beyond EIP-AGRI).
- Quality and diversity of advisors.

How did/would you try to implement this recommendation?

- Interviews with stakeholders, actors and end users from the start.
- Co-involving end users in production/design.
- Interaction in tools (gamification) and actual games.

How can we measure/determine the success of this implementation?

- Strong dissemination plan with clear indicators: number of visits/downloads, views
- Number of demo-visits
- Followers, likes on social media

How can policy help you implement this recommendation?

- Policy should demand to go beyond EIP-AGRI
- The EC should determine and share success criteria (so TNs can tell how good they are doing), EIP common format should be improved, elaborated and should be more concretely implemented.
- National authorities should also set up national TNs.
- Link Agriculture and research.
- National authorities should also get outside of their own silos and connect Ministries of Education with Ministries of Research and Ministries of Agriculture, so they are aware of the multi-actor approach and can create common funding.

6. TN Assets Leveraging

Local and well established existing networks (e.g. National Rural Networks (NRNs) or OGs), **channels** (e.g. media contacts, news outlets or farmer organizations), **meetings and activities should be used** as much as possible for getting relevant input and organizing end user communication and dissemination activities. Farmers and foresters only interact and take up information from materials, channels and people they trust. This also includes other farmers they respect in their community. Therefore, a **mapping exercise to identify the resources which farmers will use and their existing connections and support mechanisms for TNs is vital to ensure uptake of new ideas within the TN and wider dissemination throughout the farming community** (TN Communication & Dissemination).

How can your team improve this recommendation?

- Rephrase the recommendation, because it is too difficult to understand quickly.

How did/would you try to implement this recommendation?

- Engaging the farmers' organization, group,... from the beginning of the project design.
- Minimize the areas of potential conflicts (political issues) when engaging with the group.
- Allocating 'extra' time for the leveraging of the assets to spread the results.
- Make the aim and message very clear

How can we measure/determine the success of this implementation?

- Number of farmers reached with presentations, events, media, etc. beyond the original network.
- Number of projects emerging from this.

How can policy help you implement this recommendation?

- External review of the "long-term well-established" network to check if you go beyond the existing network.
- There is an advantage of conditioning trust but the broad reach might be lacking.
- Possible extra funding by a new and extra measure of dissemination (6 months, few people, simple admin procedure, maybe for a few combined projects together,...)

7. TN Digital Platform

The **digital platform** that houses the ideal TNs knowledge outputs should function so that the content shown to each user is **profile user led i.e. tailored to their profile, level of expertise and in their preferred language and format** (automatic profiling and translation). This should be organized using common easy language with well-defined concepts and focus (instead of using over-generalized buzzwords). Having a digital platform which responds to each user creates trust and validity in the platform, which can amplify the number of users it reaches and the impact it gains (TN content storage + TN content + TN multi-actor approach + TN Communication & Dissemination).

How can your team improve this recommendation?

- There should also be easy navigation between different segments, so users do not get lost.
- The platform should be responsive (adapted to the channel it is viewed on).
- The design should be understandable and catchy.
- There should be a clear glossary and vocabulary, especially for EU terminology.

- There should be an option to not see only profiled content and that you can choose yourself which content is relevant and interesting.
- Have a matchmaking option depending on the profile and the interests of the user.

How did/would you try to implement this recommendation?

- Do an investigation on the data usage (country, audience, …).
- Use a good IT partner.
- Include as many languages as possible.

How can we measure/determine the success of this implementation?

- User analytics.
- Check how many matches were made with the matchmaking option.

How can policy help you implement this recommendation?

- Help with GDPR compliance.
- Create a good rural internet connection across Europe.

8. TN Sustainability

The ideal TN should be sustainable and ensure that the **project results stay available** for the intended target audiences and beyond, even after the project has ended. In addition, it should allow actors within the network to stay connected. This could be facilitated by an online digital platform, or the continuation of meetings organized by the network themselves where they rotate the role of the facilitator (TN content storage).

How can your team improve this recommendation?

- Not all content stays relevant and therefore should not be kept sustainable. So, there needs to be an evaluation system, maybe via a dedicated partner that is the content maintenance and optimization partner that keeps the content alive.
- Create linked or common databases (like Google Scholar), so you do not get lost in a lot of different databases.
- Combine results of different projects.

How did/would you try to implement this recommendation?

- Good planning.
- Clear structure of the project sustainability.

How can we measure/determine the success of this implementation?

- How many new projects are initiated based on the results from previous projects.

How can policy help you implement this recommendation?

- EU guidelines for standardisation.
- Policy recommendations need to be short and clear on the use of the results.

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9. TN Output Accessibility

The **digital platform** that houses the ideal TN outputs should provide **easy access** to content through an **optimized search engine**, as well as a user-friendly mobile application for daily use. All **messages need to be relevant, to the point and instantly provide value to the user**. Therefore, the content should be easily searchable and findable (TN content storage).
As such, the digital platform needs to have very **good filters** in place (high signal to noise ratio within a max of 5 clicks), such as:

A.   A good categorization with keywords (geography, sectors, themes, needs, expertise, solutions, content type, origin, date, etc.) when you want to browse and be inspired.
B.   A very good and narrow search function (like google) when you want to find specifically what you are looking for.

How can your team improve this recommendation?

- Difficult to make the recommendation better.
- More attention could be given on how the database should be maintained after the project has ended. Maybe build a self-supporting user community like Wikipedia and create incentives within the project to reward users that contribute to this.
- Have a more dynamic (not static) approach.

How did/would you try to implement this recommendation?

- A good and lively mix of partners and outsiders from outside the established community need to be invited to join and they should have a leading role in setting up the project.
- Use existing open access databases.
- The database should provide both breadth and depth.

How can we measure/determine the success of this implementation?

- Understanding among end users.

How can policy help you implement this recommendation?

- More attention needs to go to legacy in project calls and framework programmes.

10. TN Training

Nonetheless, the ideal TN should also target 'analogue users' and increase the digital literacy of their 'end users' via **training/support**. The use of **professional teachers or links to a known and trusted education or training platform** can be an added value. It may also be effective to introduce 'analogue users' to digital platforms via traditional forms of knowledge exchange, such as discussion groups or F2F dissemination meetings. Here, the value and benefits of digital platforms can be established as a means of bringing this community back together online (TN Communication & Dissemination).

How can your team improve this recommendation?

- Digital training is useful to explain concepts, but it is never standalone.
- Must be complementary with F2F-meetings and demos, farmers must meet (learning by doing and working in groups), like peer2peer.

How did/would you try to implement this recommendation?

- Attractive topic/challenge
- Training should always be relevant to farmers and try to improve the bottom line, because farmers also have to make a living.
- Training should be public and not be a business.

How can we measure/determine the success of this implementation?

- Establishing monitoring system with a quality assurance.
- Develop indicators: Focus on the topic, number of attendances, degree of satisfaction, ...

How can policy help you implement this recommendation?

- More resources, such as financial.
- Infrastructure.
- Universal/university recognition.