

1st AKIS Coordination Group Meeting – 13.12.2023

Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine, Backweston Campus, Celbridge, Co. Kildare

Introduction:

Corina Roe and Karl Walsh, Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM), welcomed attendees and offered brief introductory remarks on AKIS, and the establishment of an AKIS coordination group in Ireland. The group will form part of the formal national consultative structure put in place to promote and support AKIS development in the context of CAP and Food Vision 2030 implementation and monitoring in Ireland. As set out in Ireland's CAP Strategic Plan (CSP), the Irish AKIS is required to become more collaborative, to adapt the AKIS approach to meet key challenges and threats, and to develop a new and improved organisational approach.

The Coordination Group will bring together a significant number of actors in the fields of Agriculture and Rural Development, Science and Research, Education and Communications, and provide a platform to improve synergies and complementarities on knowledge and innovation between institutions.

The chair introduced each of the speakers, who represent their organizations on the Steering Committee for the AKIS Coordination Group.

Speakers & Presentations:

Patrick Barrett (DAFM – Research & Codex Division) - AKIS Overview

- The presentation outlined the need to move knowledge much more quickly from research to end user. This should be target specific.
- Ireland is well structured and interactive. There is a high level of collaboration and coordination already, for example:
 - Knowledge Transfer (KT) activities, CPD for advisors, LEADER, National CAP Network, Research (DAFM & other)
 - AKIS coordination group will bring this all together.

Mark Gibson (Teagasc) - Teagasc & Modern AKIS

- The presentation outlined the Teagasc Structure
 - Advisory – Research – Education – Corporate services
- Research transitions through demo farms and discussion groups.
- Signpost programme is significant development.
- Teagasc ConnectED – for Agri-food professionals.
- Modern AKIS project - €10m over 7 years. 37 partners, all within Member States. The project aims to connect the AKIS coordination groups of all Member States.

Breian Carroll (Agricultural Consultants' Association) – the work of the ACA

- The presentation outlined the significant role played by the ACA in Ireland's AKIS:
 - 52% of KT groups,
 - 80% of TAMS applications,
 - 76% of Nutrient Management Plans,
 - 58% of BISS applications.
- Outlined the gap in support for farmers, with 35,000 active farmers without either a public or private advisor supporting them.
- Gave an overview of the limitations in funding for the private market, and the innovative adaptations the ACA are making to respond to the needs of the client, including climate smart advisors, EIP leadership, dedicated forestry and organic advisors, among other new approaches.

David Murphy (CAP Network Ireland) - National CAP Network

- CAP Network Ireland is a partnership between Irish Rural Link, ERINN Innovation, and Munster Technological University.
- Involved in research & innovation projects – e.g. Knowledge and dissemination tasks.
- Past services provided and expertise include:
 - Advice to research grant applicants
 - Knowledge transfer e.g. EPA
- The Network will apply their process to outputs from DAFM or EU-funded projects, to explore how best to use knowledge from project final reports and create impact pathways for dissemination.

Stephanie Vella, (EU CAP Network) - AKIS Monitoring & Evaluation

- The EU CAP Network is offering relevant activities to EU Member States through their helpdesk to support CSP implementation (including on AKIS assessment).
- Recently undertook a capacity building exercise for Ireland to reflect on the CSP process for development of the AKIS modernisation section.
- The outcomes of this exercise were presented, highlighting the good connectivity of the Irish AKIS, as well as the opportunities for better and faster dissemination.

Cormac McGann (DAFM - CSP Division)- AKIS Coordination Group Terms of Reference

- Presented the draft Terms of Reference for the AKIS Coordination Group.
- Members were invited to submit their views on the Terms of Reference via written procedure by 1 January 2024.
- It was emphasised that the membership of the overall AKIS Coordination Group, and the Steering Committee, were not fixed. Nominees for either group were welcome, from all those attending.

Preparatory Workshop:

- Following a 10-minute networking break, the final hour of the meeting comprised an interactive workshop.
- The purpose of the workshop was to develop a participatory and interactive approach amongst the coordination group members.
- The objective of the workshop was to:
 - Map out key actors in the AKIS network;
 - Identify strengths and weaknesses of the current AKIS strategic approach or key initiatives that participants are engaged in that contribute to the Irish AKIS;
 - Identify key issues and challenges that concern Coordination Group members that should be considered in a work programme for the AKIS Coordination Group.
- Attendees were split into five groups, and the following questions were put to each group:
 1. Who are the key actors in the AKIS network?
 2. Identify strengths and weaknesses of the current AKIS strategic approach or key initiatives that you are engaged in that contribute to the Irish AKIS.
 3. Identify key issues and challenges that concern you as a Coordination Group member that should be considered in a Work Programme.
 4. Who do you need to engage with to enhance knowledge uptake for you organisation or your stakeholders?
 5. What innovation activities would you like to undertake?

An overview of the outputs of these workshops is outlined in Annex 1 to this meeting report.

Closing Remarks:

During the final session of the meeting, each facilitator provided a brief summary of workshop outputs from their group to the plenary, before the Chair gave closing remarks. The next steps for the Group is to agree a draft work programme, based on the feedback in the workshops held at this meeting. Attendees were invited to submit any additional thoughts or comments via written procedure to CAPStrategicPlan@Agriculture.gov.ie;

The next meeting of the AKIS Coordination Group will be held in 2024, with a specific date TBC.

Annex 1: Overview of outputs from workshop sessions

1.1 Overview of identified stakeholders

The AKIS Coordination Group members identified a long list of potential stakeholders with whom the group should engage. These included possible key contacts across the following nine areas:

- Governmental Organisations, agencies and Departments
- Advisory services and semi-public agencies
- Farm Bodies and representative groups for farmers
- Non-Governmental Organisations, including environmentally-focused groups
- Rural Communities and representative groups
- Industry, particularly agricultural industry, but also secondary stakeholders
- Education and Research
- Local and National Media, as well as online media, including influencers.
- Other Bodies (General Public, Private Veterinarians, other such groups that are not easily categorized above)

Many specific nominations to the AKIS Coordination Group were suggested, and the Steering Committee will follow up with these to seek nominees to the wider Group.

1.2 Identified Strengths

The AKIS Coordination Group identified many key strengths that can be leveraged in improving the Irish AKIS, including:

Single Governing Body	AKIS engagement, particularly among young farmers
Teagasc well integrated with national and international research	Trust from farmers to advisors
Broad reach of existing networks (over 90,000 farmers have advisors)	Engagement from high level to low
Knowledge transfer already happening	Industry links
Very strong advice for mainstream enterprises	Public funding level generally good
Unique/thematic approach to EIPs	Broadband/infrastructure
Strong EIP AGRI activity	Farm orgs engaged in delivering messages
Good balance of public/private advisory services	Strong private & public advice available
Small country, facilitates peer-to-peer learning quickly	Human capital across all stakeholders
Plenty of good demo-farms	Educational research
Good best practice available	Support Network

1.3 Identified Weaknesses

The AKIS Coordination Group identified many key weaknesses that threaten the impact of the Group, and could be opportunities for improvement, including:

Funding structure for advisory service	Language of technicality
High influence from small number of stakeholders	Tracking progress
Communication, poor language/messaging	Innovation updates, adaptation and interpretation is not coordinated

Availability of information/contact points	Hard to reach farmers not reached (ageing, parttime)
Lack of specialists/multidisciplinary advisors	Ageing farming community
Lack of focus on better gender inclusion	Large companies driving sector with finance and incentives
Not enough "place-based", locally led approaches	Dependence on payments for KT
Duplication and competition between groups	Feedback loop not always there
Lack of focus in some areas (e.g. food systems, horticulture)	Fragmented structures, duplication of effort
Many dissenting voices	Role of advisors-capacity/time/ageing
Conflicts between advice vs sales e.g., merchant agronomists	Demand for products, but the system is changing
Flow from R+D to advisors is too slow	

1.4 Key Issues

When asked to identify key issues, the AKIS Coordination Group had many suggestions. Some of the more popular or repeated suggestions are listed below:

AKIS needs better attention on focused innovation, and real change
Groups need to be empowered to impact change
AKIS needs better coordination
There is a lack of geographic tailoring of activities
There needs to be better management of time investment for training farmers
Effective farmer engagement should be prioritised.
There is a risk that group recommendations won't be embraced by government authorities/competent bodies, or by farmers/users.
Need to define and quantify priority areas, and hard to reach farmers and plan how to engage
Schemes are not levers for all subsectors, there are other drivers CSP/ESG/consumers

1.5 Suggested activities

AKIS Coordination Group members were asked to suggest key themes for meetings, and possible activities that the group could engage in over the medium term. Some of the suggestions included:

Possible activities	
Review CPD programmes/make recommendations	Financial planning
Engage in gender-sensitive discussions	Follow-up on EIP learnings
Feed into FAS/qualification requirements	Give feedback on proposed training/KT topics
Learn about other initiatives and pilot projects	Cooperation partnerships
Communicate outcomes of events	Facilitate on EIPs
Support networking	Engage with farmers and establish contact points for farmers, with technical expertise
Relationship management	Resolve complex system of getting info to farmers
Improved knowledge transfer between members	Targeted advice for individual operators
DAFM Plain English campaign	Structure grants to encourage sustainability
Farm safety	DAFM look at long term schemes for long term env challenges

Lighthouse farms	Targeting of knowledge to land types and farming systems
Mock training course for feedback after training	Plug into informal farmer to farmer networks
Agri companies to incentivise good practice	Learn from other member states
Indicators that align to RD/CSP	Farmer-led schemes
Possible themes for meetings and workshops	
Supply Chain	
Training and Knowledge Transfer/Exchange	
EIPs, EIP scaling, upcoming calls, etc	
Women in Agriculture	
CPD for advisors and broader actors	
Use of new technology	

	Name of Organisation	Attended
Agencies	Teagasc Knowledge Transfer	Mark Gibson
	Teagasc Knowledge Transfer	Stan Lalor
Farm Bodies and Representative groups	Ag Tech Ireland	Catherine Lascurettes
	Agricultural Consultants Association	Breian Carroll
	CAP Network Ireland	Daniel Bennett
	CAP Network Ireland	James Claffey
	CAP Network Ireland	Sarah Glascott
	CAP Network Ireland	Eva Greene
	CAP Network Ireland	David Murphy
	Irish Cattle and Sheep Farmers' Association	Neassa Fitzgibbon
	Irish Cooperative Organisation Society	John Brosnan
	Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers Association	Brian Delaney
	Irish Farmers Association	Shane Whelan
	Irish Local Development Network	Sabina Trench
	Irish Natura and Hill Farmers' Association	Micheal Mc Donnell
	Irish Natura and Hill Farmers' Association	Tommy Slevin
	Irish Organic Association	Stephen Meredith
	Organic Trust Ltd	Julian Pawlowski
Environmental NGOs	Environmental Pillar	Charles Stanley Smith
	Natural Capital Ireland	Noreen Byrne
Education and Research Institutions	ATU Donegal	Michael Gill
	ATU Galway	James Moran
	MTU	David Barry
	SETU	John Geraghty
	TUS	Dr Margaret Brennan Fournet
	UCC	Prof Frank Buckley
	UCD	Prof Monica Gorman
	University of Galway	Prof Maura Farrell
Agri-Food Processing	ABP	Stephen Connolly
	<u>Dawn Meats</u>	Gill Higgins
	Kerry Group	Sibéal Bird
	Lakeland	Niall Mc Loughlin
	Liffey Meats	Nathan Galligan
	Tirlan	Thomas Ryan
Media	Agriland	Cormac Farrelly
DAFM Supporting divisions	Agricultural Environment & Structures	John Muldowney
	Biodiversity,Nature and Land Use	Tom Medlycott
	CAP Strategic Plan	Cormac Mc Gann
	CAP Strategic Plan	Edel Meenan
	CAP Strategic Plan	Brian O'Reilly
	CAP Strategic Plan	Sean O'Reilly
	CAP Strategic Plan	Corina Roe
	Crops Evaluation & Certification	Cara Mac Aodhain

	Direct Payments (Beef Schemes & Land Policy)	Antoinette Conroy
	Direct Payments (Beef Schemes & Land Policy)	Audrey Lyons
	Feedingstuffs, Fertilisers, Grain & Poultry	Finbarr O' Regan
	Organics & Market Supports	Jack Nolan
	Plant Health & Horticulture	Tamsen Harward
	Research & Codex	Patrick Barrett
	Research & Codex	Matthew Halpin
	Research & Codex	Karl Walsh
	Vet. (Animal health & welfare)	Martin Hayes