

National AKIS Coordination Group

Terms of Reference

1. Introduction

The Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS) is the combined organisation, knowledge flow, integration and interaction between people, organisations and institutions¹ that produce, disseminate and use knowledge and innovation for agriculture and interrelated activities in rural areas².

AKIS has evolved from previously being a primarily academic concept to now being a broad approach for agricultural knowledge and innovation policy development, implementation and engagement. This approach is developed under the Common Agricultural Policy & Horizon Europe (see annex I), between EU Member States and nationally e.g. through Departments, agencies such as Teagasc, Bord Bia and the EPA and organisations such as the Agricultural Consultants Association and a whole host of other stakeholders.

Due to these developments, awareness of the importance of strengthening AKIS has increased with the **aim to address the better connection of science and practice and to boost knowledge exchange and innovation for the benefit of e.g. European farmers and foresters, their advisors and rural dwellers**. In addition, the expanded policy scope that the agri-food sector needs to address (e.g. EU Green Deal, Brexit, Programme for Government, National Climate Action Plan, Food Vision 2030, Sustainable Development Goals, Digitalisation, Just Transition) all point to the need to further develop the AKIS approach to meet societal challenges and threats. In order to address key challenges, the CAP Strategic Plan identifies there is a need to develop a new organisational approach for AKIS in Ireland and other EU Member States to develop an approach that can meet the challenges.

The national AKIS policy is led by the Department of Agriculture, Food & Marine (DAFM) and this document has been drawn up by DAFM setting out the terms of reference within which an **AKIS Consultation Group** will operate. It covers the following areas:

- Vision
- Status
- Mandate
- Goals & Objectives
- Governance
- List of areas from which invited groups and organisations will be drawn

¹ Educators, Researchers, Advisors, Businesses, Organisations, Media

² including landscapes, environment, climate, biodiversity, consumers and citizens, food and non-food biobased systems including transformation and distribution chains

2. A Vision for a Successful AKIS in Ireland

Food Vision 2030 indicates that Ireland should **Develop a Dynamic Knowledge Exchange Environment** ([Mission 4, Goal 3](#), Pg 153-155).

The CAP Strategic Plan (CSP) SWOT analysis and Needs Assessment and the Commission CSP recommendation on AKIS both highlight that, while the constituent parts of the Irish AKIS (Research, Knowledge Transfer (KT), Farm Advisory Service (FAS), Cooperation & CAP Network) are well established, there is a need to further structure and mobilise the AKIS so that there is improved coordination, integration, collaboration and networking.

The vision for the Irish AKIS is to better connect people and organisations through dynamic engagement to facilitate improved and speedier information flow between knowledge producers, innovation intermediaries, businesses, organisations, institutions and knowledge users. A successful AKIS will ensure AKIS actors have the training and skills to be more responsive to societal challenges such as climate change and sustainable food systems and to the growing information needs of farmers, rural economy actors, advisors, researchers and other agri-food system & bioeconomy stakeholders so as to address these challenges.

3. Status of the AKIS Coordination Group

As indicated in the CAP Strategic Plan (Section 8.1 Modernisation and Simplification), the AKIS Coordination Group will form part of the formal national consultative structure put in place to promote and support AKIS development and CAP and Food Vision 2030 implementation and monitoring in Ireland. The Coordination Group will operate for an initial two-year period and will then be reviewed in preparation for the remainder of the CAP period up to 2027.

4. Mandate

The **AKIS Coordination Group** mandate is set out in the CAP Strategic Plan as follows: *to strengthen the links between the actors in the AKIS, the Managing Authority will establish and chair an AKIS coordination group which will provide a platform to improve synergies and complementarities between people, organisations and institutions.*

5. Goals, Objectives, Deliverables & Reporting

The goal of the coordination group is to structure and mobilise AKIS actors together on a planned and regular basis, creating consistent engagement to support modernisation, innovation and knowledge flows and speed up knowledge exchange and implementation in practice.

A strategic work programme with agreed objectives, deliverables and appropriate reporting, monitoring and indicators shall be agreed by the Coordination Group on foot of a proposal by the Chairperson. The programme shall be reviewed regularly but any subsequent changes shall only take effect with the agreement of the Group.

The strategic work programme will involve (but may not be limited to) addressing the following goals:

- *Mapping the Irish AKIS and developing a systems map and visual AKIS representation*
- *Education, training and skills provided in a flexible, adaptive and innovative manner*
- *Improving the relevance and uptake of knowledge outputs from research and innovation by end-users*
- *Enhanced Knowledge Transfer and Farm Advisory Service including improved accessibility and promotion of advisory services with Continued Professional Development for both public & private advisors ensuring all advisers have the training and skills needed to implement best practice.*
- *Improved networking, collaboration and development of innovation support services to strengthen links and activities between research, advisors, the farming community, the rural economy. This will include development of cooperation and interactive-innovation projects under EIP-AGRI and LEADER and also include the development of an EU knowledge reservoir for practice.*
- *Promoting and supporting the Digital Transition in Agriculture through: a coordinated approach; development and uptake of digital and data-based technologies and services; addressing of governance and societal impact of agri-digitalisation.*

The Forum will formally report to the CAP Consultative Committee and the Food Vision High Level Implementation Committee (HLIC) as required.

6. Governance of the AKIS Coordination Group

Invitations to participate in the Forum

Invitations to participate on the AKIS Coordination Group will be issued by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. The AKIS Coordination group will be established upon the commencement of the new CAP programming period.

The membership of the coordination group will comprise of representatives of core stakeholders involved in the AKIS in Ireland and will at a minimum involve representatives from: relevant Government Departments; operational agencies such as Teagasc, Bord Bia, NPWS and the EPA. It will also engage with CAP LEADER, the National CAP Network, Private Advisory services, ICBF, Higher Education Institutions, Farm and other Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), and relevant Associations & Councils. The group's membership will be kept under regular review.

Structure of the AKIS Coordination Group

The Group will comprise:

- A Chairperson from DAFM;
- Invited Members to be broadly representative of the Irish AKIS.

A steering group comprising the Chair, officials serving as the secretariat of the Coordination Group and other invited members as nominated by the Chair to support the Coordination Group in the efficient and effective discharge of its role and functions.

The secretariat to the Coordination Group is comprised of representatives nominated from DAFM and other representatives as may be approved by the Chair.

Role of the Chairperson

The chairperson will preside over the Coordination Group to ensure that its business is conducted in an ethical, fair, and diligent manner, in line with the Terms of Reference. The chairperson will be responsible for setting agendas for meetings of the Coordination Group, for setting its work programme and the work programmes of any subgroups which may be established. The chairperson will be responsible for reports on the activities of the Coordination Group as appropriate.

Period of tenure of the members of the AKIS Coordination Group

The period of tenure of the members of the Coordination Group will be for an initial period of two years from the date of the first meeting.

Operation of the Coordination Group with vacancy/vacancies among its members

The Coordination Group may continue to operate notwithstanding one or more vacancies among its Members. The chairperson of the Coordination Group has the responsibility to determine if a quorum is present.

Procedures for arriving at conclusions

Matters will generally be decided by consensus.

The Coordination Group will agree its own rules of procedure as necessary for the efficient and effective conduct of its business.

Sub-groups

Where appropriate, sub-groups will be established and supported by the Coordination Group focusing on specific topics

Unavailability of Chairperson to chair a meeting

Where the Chairperson is not available to chair a meeting, the Chairperson can nominate another Department official to chair the meeting.

Frequency of meetings

It is envisaged that there will be a minimum of four meetings per year held on a quarterly basis.

Minutes of meetings

A summary report of each meeting will be prepared and published on the www.gov.ie website focusing on the outputs and actions as soon as practicable after a decision has been reached at each meeting.

7. Expenses of Group Members

DAFM will not pay costs for attending meetings, therefore Members of the Group will need to claim travel and subsistence from their respective parent organisations.

8. External Expertise

The Coordination Group may invite and accept submissions from interested bodies and will seek such expert advice as it considers desirable.

Appendix 1 Members of the AKIS Coordination Group

As AKIS is cross-cutting and in practice supports modernisation, innovation and knowledge flows it requires a variety of expert input. The membership of the Coordination Group may comprise external experts drawn from from Departments, Agencies, Education, Research, Industry, Science & Technology, NGOs and Community related groups under the following headings.

The sectors which should be represented on the AKIS Coordination Group include:

- Representatives of public and NGO with an outlook on land and marine ecosystems
- Representatives of the producers of biological resources (in sectors such as agriculture, forestry, horticulture)
- Representatives of sectors and industry using or processing biological resources, including dairy, horticulture, forestry, food & feed production, nutrients, grain, proteins etc.
- AKIS related platforms, representative groups and knowledge hubs
- State Agencies whose area of responsibility focuses or has a focus on AKIS
- Service providers and utilities whose business impacts on AKIS
- Representatives of local and regional government and stakeholders

Appendix 2

What is AKIS?

The Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS) is the combined organisation, knowledge flow, integration and interaction between people, organisations and institutions that produce, disseminate and use knowledge and innovation for agriculture and interrelated activities in rural areas.

AKIS describes an **innovation ecosystem** and links with institutional infrastructure and policy instruments that supports its functioning with its incentives and budget mechanisms. An AKIS has diverse actors from the private, public and non-profit sectors relating to agriculture, rural economy, food and biobased systems. The system may include actors such as farmers, farm workers, foresters, agricultural educators, researchers, non-academic experts, NGOs, public and independent private advisors, value chain actors, ministries and agencies and service providers in the agricultural and rural economy.

The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union³ recognizes that measures may be made within the framework of CAP for an effective coordination of efforts in the spheres of vocational training, of research and of the dissemination of agricultural knowledge. In this context, AKIS has evolved from previously being a primarily academic concept to now being a **broader approach for agricultural knowledge and innovation policy development** and engagement with related sectors under the Common Agricultural Policy and beyond. Due to this policy development, awareness of the importance of **strengthening AKIS** has increased, to address the better connection of science and practice and to boost knowledge exchange and innovation for the benefit of European farmers, foresters and rural dwellers.

To further this matter, the EU Commission reflected in the future CAP proposals post 2020 and in the EU Research and Innovation Framework proposal Horizon Europe that each Member States AKIS needs to be **further strengthened to structure knowledge exchange and foster innovation processes**. The Commission proposes that well-functioning AKISs will help speed up innovation throughout the EU, avoid duplication of efforts, save costs and make better use of existing resources and strengthen the impact of EU and national and regional research and innovation funding. The Commission also indicated that there is already a **substantial amount of knowledge available** and that agricultural research is continually delivering new advancements, however the **available knowledge is fragmented** and is **insufficiently applied in practice**. In effect, the agri-food and biobased sector has considerable and under-used innovation capacity. The Commission proposes that for quicker impact, innovative solutions are best **co-created by people with complementary knowledge**, and by the real end-users of the project results. In effect, they bring in the necessary practical (tacit) knowledge to make the result applicable in practice. Moreover, it is recognized that new combinations, **collaborations and networks of knowledge and actors drives innovation**. This approach has already been reflected in the European Innovation Partnership on Agricultural productivity and sustainability (EIP-AGRI) which was launched in 2012, setting the framework conditions for EIP-AGRI Operational Groups and Horizon 2020 Thematic Networks and multi-actor approaches and at the same time supporting the evolution and progression of EU AKISs.

³ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:12012E/TXT&from=EN>