

# European Innovation Partnership -an instrument for sustainable development in a knowledge-based society

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## **ABSTRACT**

In nowadays society innovation has become a decisive factor in the state of economic and social development of a country or region. At the European Union level, changes have occurred in the approach of this factor, knowledge becoming increasingly appreciated and promoted as an indispensable resource. Currently efforts are being made towards improving knowledge transfer to intercede the distribution of this valuable resource across the European space. The agricultural European Innovation Partnership represents the newest instrument in perfecting knowledge transfer in agriculture. Their approach is different, following the "interactive innovation model" which involves creating partnerships between farmers, advisors, researchers, businesses, and other stakeholders in Operational Groups. EIPs are expected to ensure the optimal development opportunities for partners in innovation and research, so they will be able to work together, reaching better and faster results.

***Keywords:** innovation, sustainability, knowledge transfer, partnership, rural development*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Economic development is a key condition in the process of improving the standard of living and quality of life. In achieving a high level of economic development, knowledge and innovation have a crucial influence, empowering those who own it. The concept of knowledge transfer has become increasingly used and its importance has been noted and is now emphasized by European Union policies.

## **THE AGRICULTURAL EUROPEAN INNOVATION PARTNERSHIP**

The current CAP reform highlights the necessity for a notable development of research and innovation in order to approach the demanding social challenges of food security in the circumstances of the current land use competition and pressures on resources and the environment.

In the Commission's CAP reform proposals are set out three instruments in order to support this process:

- Ongoing support of the rural development (Pillar 2) for investment in processes and technologies in agriculture and food supply sector, followed by an upgrading of farmer advisory services to make them more effective.
- Agricultural and food research will receive increased financial support under the Commission's Horizon 2020 research program
- An European Innovation Partnership, which is an instrument for the development of agricultural productivity and sustainability

As we notice above, the Europe 2020 Strategy provides the organization of European Innovation Partnerships (EIPs) in different economic sectors, as an answer to the challenge of developing EU research and innovation.

EIPs place the emphasis on social welfare and swift updating in the sector they are focusing on. EIPs are expected to ensure the optimal development opportunities for partners in innovation and research, so they will be able to work together, reaching better and faster results.

The agricultural European Innovation Partnership (EIP-A) aims to nurture competitive and sustainable agriculture that "achieves more and better from less". This partnership intends to bring its contribution to providing a steady food supply, its efforts taking into consideration the essential natural resources balance, which must be undisturbed because the evolution of farming depends on this fragile equilibrium. Its intention is to bring together main actors, policies and actions at EU and national levels, from research to market, around common objectives to address major societal challenges more effectively.

The objectives of the EIP-A are expressed in Art 61(1) of the proposal for a Rural Development Regulation for the programming period 2014-2020: "The EIP for agricultural productivity and sustainability shall:

- (a) Promote a resource efficient, productive, low emission, climate friendly and resilient agricultural sector, working in harmony with the essential natural resources on which farming depends;
- (b) Help deliver a steady supply of food, feed and biomaterials, both existing and new ones;
- (c) Improve processes to preserve the environment, adapt to climate change and mitigate it;
- (d) Build bridges between cutting-edge research knowledge and technology and farmers, businesses and advisory services."

The innovation model provided by the EIP-A does more than interceding the knowledge transfer from laboratory to practice (also called the "linear innovation model"), by following a different model, referred to as the "interactive innovation model" which involves creating partnerships between farmers, advisors, researchers, businesses, and other stakeholders in Operational Groups.

## **OPERATIONAL GROUPS**

By creating Operational Groups, it is intended the stimulation of innovation from all parties, generating new perceptions and insights of the problems debated, thus incorporating existing knowledge into practical solutions. They will reunite researchers, advisors, farmers, businesses, NGOs and other actors in order to find new and practical solutions by implementing innovative projects in accordance with the objectives of the EIP-A.

An Operational Group is formed on the request of interested parties and pursue an innovation project. First, a description of the project is made, the expected innovative results and the manner to achieve them are established and finally the work management process of the Operational Group is specified. In addition, Operational Groups are obliged to disseminate the results of their effort through the EIP network.

Operational Groups may engage in projects referring to "the development of new products, practices, processes and technologies in the agriculture, food and forestry sectors" (Art 36 (2) (a)) as well as "pilot projects" (Art.36 (2) (b)).

### **THE FUNDING OF OPERATIONAL GROUPS**

In what concerns the funding of the Operational Groups' activity, the projects may benefit from support under rural development measures or from those of the EU's research policy.

Horizon 2020 represents an EU framework for funding research and innovation. It states that the sum of 4.5 billion € has been assigned for the Societal Challenge "Food security, sustainable agriculture, marine and maritime research and the bioeconomy".

This particular framework funds projects oriented towards practice, like "multi-actor approach" and "thematic networks" that has the purpose to "ensure interactions between researcher, businesses, farmers/producers, advisors and end-users". This pattern matches exactly with the Operational Groups.

Funding may be obtained through other policies, such as the EU Regional Policy, through the European Regional Development Fund and the Cohesion Fund, as well as Education Policy.

Apart from EU policies, the national/regional policies in Member States should provide opportunities of additional funding for these structures.

### **EIP NETWORK AND EIP-A SERVICE POINT**

The European Innovation Partnership Service Point has the role of mediation between the stakeholders of the EIP's including farmers, advisors, agri-business, civil society, and researchers, facilitating communication as well as knowledge and skill transfer. This structure was appointed by The European Commission's Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development in April 2013.

The EIP-A Service Point gathers and shares information on policy measures in the research and innovation field, research activities, funding opportunities and any other data that could be of interest to the actors in their approach.

The Service Point makes interaction between different groups, players, and networks easier and more accessible, using a variety of communication channels (seminars, conferences, publications, website, and social media).

### **HIGH LEVEL STEERING BOARD OF THE EIP "AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIVITY AND SUSTAINABILITY"**

For the right development and implementation of the European Innovation Partnership (EIP) on Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability and for guidance, it has been appointed a High Level Steering Board by Dacian Cioloș, European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development and Máire Geoghegan-Quinn, European Commissioner for Research, Innovation and Science, who co-chairs the Steering Board. The High Level Steering Board provides the EIP with guidelines, by elaborating a Strategic Implementation Plan (SIP) which gives strategic advice and recommendations to the EIP and provides orientation on its main working areas.

### **CHALLENGES**

- Cultural differences between the members of the same or different groups. In order to work together, it is imperative to develop a homogenous working environment and culture
- Stakeholders groups will vary in member number, activity and interests and it is going to be challenging to address them as a whole.
- The differences in culture and understanding of the agriculture between rural and urban areas.

- Research and innovation involve risk taking, and all group members must be aware of the possibility of failure, but in the same time, this event should not affect the evaluation of the project's idea and development.
- There are differences between Member States in approaching innovation and understanding its importance, and this premise should be taken into account.

## **CONCLUSION**

Agriculture within the EU space is currently facing challenges that are going to have to be resolved taking into account the environment as well as the needs of future generations.

In order to successfully face those challenges, all the actors involved in this process have to work together for developing innovative solutions, to be applied in practice.

The European Innovation Partnership provides the opportunity for all stakeholders in food supply chain to participate in finding new pathways to address their problems and to learn from each other by sharing knowledge and experiences. The exchange of information and knowledge and interchangeable learning will ensure a proper use and success of policies like the Rural Development Policy and the Framework Program for Research and Innovation Horizon 2020.

The key areas that are facing challenges have been identified, in accordance the EIP-A will find ways to address them, without disturbing the balance between sustainability and the food supply chain. This is not an easy mission, but cooperation and the desire to make progress through innovation will open the way to a wide range of solutions that will integrate the two main priorities mentioned above. Another requirement is that innovation combines in a smart manner traditional knowledge with new scientific knowledge in order to provide value-added

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