

Position Paper of the Innovation Support Services (ISS) for EIP-Agri
in the Federal States of Germany

Strengthening Innovation Support Services: Effectively advancing innovation in agriculture and forestry

Insights and recommendations from over ten years of ISS work in Germany

Executive Summary

This position paper summarizes key insights derived from the practical work of Innovation Support Services (ISS) and a nationwide survey among German EIP-AGRI coordinators. It identifies key areas of action and recommendations for the development of ISS in the context of EIP-AGRI in Germany. The focus is on three thematic areas:

1. Role and institutional anchoring of ISS
2. Networking and collaboration within the EIP-AGRI network
3. Impact, knowledge transfer, and exploitation of results

The aim is to support the development of framework conditions allowing ISS to provide even more effective impulses, support processes, and shape networks, enabling innovations to reach and be potentially adopted by agricultural and forestry practice more quickly and sustainably.

Signed by the ISS of the Federal States:

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Introduction

The European Commission established the role of Innovation Support Services (ISS) within EIP-AGRI to accelerate the transfer of innovation into agricultural and forestry practice. A development of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) was to require Member States to strengthen support for innovation in agriculture and forestry and to provide appropriate support structures to make this happen.ⁱ Experience to date shows that the success of EIP-AGRI depends significantly on the work of ISS: with their support numerous projects have been initiated, collaborations formed, and innovation processes implemented efficiently.ⁱⁱ ISS have established themselves as key actors in the implementation of EIP-AGRI. Their role is to support innovation processes, bring together stakeholders, and assist EIP-AGRI Operational Groups. They also act as an interface between agricultural or forestry practice, advisory services, science, and administration, supporting the development of project ideas, the formation of partnerships, and organizational and strategic aspects throughout projects' lifecycles. Within the Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS), ISS play a crucial role and contribute significantly to effective knowledge transfer, networking, and innovation in agriculture.

In Germany, the ISS role is carried out by different organizations. Accordingly, task profiles, working methods, and structural conditions vary between federal states. This diversity reflects the federal structure and accounts for regional specificities. Despite differences in organizational design, all actors pursue a common goal: to promote innovation in agriculture and forestry and support its implementation in practice.

This position paper is the result of a joint reflection and coordination process among ISS in Germany. It is based on discussions and outcomes from the ISS meeting within the EIP-AGRI coordinators meeting held from March 3rd to 5th 2026 in Bremen and a nationwide survey among EIP stakeholders conducted within the Horizon Europe project ATTRACTISS. The paper consolidates key experiences from over ten years of ISS work in the federal states, provides essential insights, identifies success factors, and provides recommendations for the future design and functioning of ISS in Germany.

1. Role, Tasks, and Structural Preconditions of ISS

Implementation experiences show that ISS see their role as more than supporting applications of OG; in particular, they highlight their roles accompanying innovation processes and managing networks. They aim to continuously support EIP-AGRI Operational Groups, moderating group processes assisting in addressing challenges and ensuring continuity. To fulfill this role, ISS require stable structural conditions. In many federal states, at least one full-time position – often two – is necessary to cover tasks in supporting EIP-AGRI Operational Groups, networking activities and knowledge transfer. There is also a clear need for predictability and professional development in this role, including adequate access to and funding to attend training opportunities.

Close exchange between ISS, Paying Agencies, and Managing Authorities has proven to be an important success factor. This exchange makes it possible to incorporate lessons learned from projects into the development of funding practices and to address administrative hurdles at an early stage.

Recommendations:

- Ensure continuous support of EIP-AGRI Operational Groups throughout the entire project duration by securing long-term funding of ISS over at least one funding period.
- Secure at least one full-time position supporting EIP-AGRI Operational Groups per federal state, with a view of 1–2 positions depending on project scope and regional conditions.
- Allow for flexible use of operational funds for networking, travel, and event organization.
- Provide systematic training and professional development opportunities for ISS and actively allocate time and resources for this purpose.
- Establish regular exchange opportunities, in different formats, between ISS, Paying Agencies, and Managing Authorities to systematically incorporate practical project experience into the development of funding practices.

2. Networking and Collaboration within the EIP Network

Within EIP-AGRI, ISS play a central role in building and maintaining networks. Innovation often emerges where different perspectives – from practice, science, advisory services, and business – come together.

Active networking has become a core task of ISS. This includes targeted partner matchmaking and organizing exchange activities and networking events to share experiences and spark collaborations. At the same time, networking contributes to disseminating ongoing and completed projects' knowledge. Effective networking requires time, resources, and appropriate structural conditions, for example, budget allocated to events, travel, and communication implementation. ISS need sufficient flexibility to actively and creatively shape networking activities, test new formats, and initiate collaborations beyond established structures.

Recommendations:

- Define networking as a long-term priority for ISS.
- Allocate budget for networking events, workshops, travel expenses, and communication measures; and allow for sufficient ISS flexibility when spending it.
- Expand networks beyond the agricultural sector, leveraging ISS expertise and connections to establish partnerships with stakeholders from other innovation and economic sectors (e.g., startups, economic development agencies, research) to leverage synergies.
- Use ISS networks for knowledge transfer and to systematically disseminate results.

3. Impact, Knowledge Transfer, and Exploitation of Results

A central objective of EIP-AGRI is to transfer innovative solutions into agricultural and forestry practice as quickly as possible. ISS can make a significant contribution by supporting knowledge transfer between projects, stakeholders, and federal states, regions and member states, ensuring that project results become visible and usable. Experience shows that communication and result exploitation are generally recognized as important tasks. ISS consider their role to include actively disseminating project results, identifying relevant target groups, and using appropriate communication channels. They also share a perception that the exploitation of results has not yet reached its full potential, as many project results could have a stronger impact in practice or be used beyond individual projects if the results were better and further communicated.

A key starting point is to consider knowledge transfer and continuity into the innovation process at an early stage. Transfer strategies, potential target groups, and follow-up opportunities should be taken into account during the application phase and project selection. In addition, understanding the funding landscape is key to continuing to develop successful projects or guiding them toward market uptake. ISS can play an important intermediary role here, by providing access to networks, funding programs, and relevant contacts to share results and explore further development of projects.

Recommendations:

- Provide space and resources for active communication and dissemination of project results; and identify this as a core task of ISS, supporting them to make it happen.
- Incorporate transfer strategies as early as during the project development and proposal submission stages.
- Define target audiences and pathways for practical application for the innovation at an early stage.
- Support ISS in accessing funding landscapes, economic development instruments, and follow-up programs.

Outlook

Experience from more than a decade of ISS work clearly shows that innovation emerges where people collaborate, share knowledge, and test new ideas. ISS make a decisive contribution to this process. To make even greater use of the potential of ISS within EIP-AGRI – especially regarding the new CAP funding period starting in 2028 – reliable structures, active networks, and systematic transfer of knowledge and project results into practice are essential. By strengthening these framework conditions in a targeted manner, EIP-AGRI can continue to be a key driver of innovation in agriculture and forestry all over Europe in the future.

¹ European Parliament & Council of the European Union (2021). *Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 establishing rules on support for strategic plans to be drawn up by Member States under the common agricultural policy (CAP Strategic Plans Regulation)*. Official Journal of the European Union, L 435. Brussels. [Regulation - 2021/2115 - EN - EUR-Lex](#)

² European Commission. Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development (2016). *Evaluation study of the implementation of the European innovation partnership for agricultural productivity and sustainability: Final report*. Publications Office of the European Union. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2762/755034>

European Commission. Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development – Unit A.3 (2024). *Study on outcomes achieved by EIP-AGRI Operational Group projects under the CAP*. https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/publications/study-outcomes-achieved-eip-agri-operational-group-projects-under-cap_en