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06

Policy Innovation and Project development in the Agrisector



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Module Information

Module number: 06

Module title: Policy Innovation and Project development in the Agrisector

Estimated completion time for learners: approximately 45 minutes

Learning Objective

In this module, learners explore how EU agri-policy shapes local rural action and how regional actors can turn policy priorities into practical projects, evidence-based policy insights and collaborative innovation networks.

The module is designed for regional development agents, Local Action Groups, cooperatives, advisors and other rural development actors working with farmers, smallholders and local food systems.

By the end of the module, learners will be able to connect agri-policy priorities with local needs, design short and realistic agri-project concepts, translate local evidence into policy-relevant messages, and map rural innovation networks that connect practice, research, funding and policy.

Agenda

Unit 1:Understanding agri - policy

Unit 2: Designing small agri-projects

Unit 3: Translating local evidence into policy influence

Unit 4: Building rural innovation networks



Unit 1: Understanding agri - policy

In this unit, learners examine how EU agri-policies, including the Common Agricultural Policy, the European Green Deal and the Farm to Fork Strategy, shape opportunities for farmers, smallholders and regional development agencies.



Unit 1 – Understanding agri - policy

Why EU agri-policy matters today

EU and national agri-policies are currently directed by the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) 2023–2027. The EU is reshaping its food and farming systems to be climate-friendly, resource-efficient and competitive. The European Green Deal sets the direction for this transition.

- European Green Deal (2019): the EU's long-term plan for climate neutrality and sustainable growth.
- Farm to Fork Strategy: a blueprint for fair, healthy and sustainable food systems.
- Common Agricultural Policy (CAP 2023–2027): the main framework guiding farm income support and rural development.

What is changing after 2027?

The current CAP operates under two pillars. The source material presents a simplified overview of a future direction in which agricultural funding would be integrated into a broader fund structure.

CAP becomes part of a single broader fund: European Fund for Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion, Agriculture and Rural Prosperity.

The current two pillars, EAGF and EAFRD, merge into one fund.

EUR 300 billion is reserved for income and crisis support.

EUR 6.3 billion is linked to a Unity Safety Net for market shocks.

· EUR 865 billion is linked to National and Regional Partnership Plans.

· Member States receive more flexibility.

· There is stronger focus on results, innovation and young farmers.

Unit 1 – Understanding agri - policy

What this means for Regional Development Agencies and Local Action Groups

Regional Development Agencies and Local Action Groups can help connect EU goals with local implementation. Their roles may include:

- Translating EU goals into regional actions.
- Facilitating access to CAP funding and eco-schemes.
- Building capacity through training and advisory services.
- Fostering collaboration between farmers, researchers, technology providers and local authorities.

What this means for smallholders and family farms
Opportunities for small farms include:

- Eco-scheme payments for sustainable practices such as crop rotation, reduced pesticide use and organic farming.
- Short supply chains that increase income and community engagement.
- Digital tools and traceability systems that support access to premium markets.

Strengthening local food systems

EU strategies can support local food networks through practical actions such as:

- Farm-to-School and Farm-to-Hospital programmes that create stable demand.
- Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA), which strengthens local economies.
- Processing and infrastructure grants that support food hubs, storage and small processing units.

EU COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY (CAP) AT A GLANCE

Supporting Farmers, Protecting Nature, Strengthening Rural Areas



01 What is CAP?

A set of policies and funding mechanisms by the EU to support agriculture.

Goals:

- Ensure food security
- Support farmers' income
- Promote sustainable farming
- Protect rural landscapes

02 CAP Budget (2023–2027)

Total: €386.6 billion

- **Pillar 1:** Direct Payments - €270 billion
- **Pillar 2:** Rural Development - €87 billion
- **Other:** Market support, crisis reserve

03 Who Benefits?

- 6.5 million farmers across the EU
- Rural communities
- Environmental and biodiversity projects

04 CAP Green Architecture

- **Eco-schemes:** Voluntary green practices (e.g., crop rotation, cover crops)
- **Conditionality:** Basic environmental and climate standards
- **Agri-environment-climate measures:** Long-term sustainability projects

05 Key Impacts

- 40% of EU budget goes to CAP
- 25% of CAP funds dedicated to climate and environment
- Boosts rural employment and innovation

CAP 2028–2034: A New Chapter in EU Agricultural Policy

Simpler Rules, Stronger Support, Greener Future

01

Strategic Goals

- **Food Security:** Ensure affordable, safe, high-quality food for 450 million EU citizens.
- **Farmer Support:** Provide predictable income and crisis support.
- **Environmental Action:** Promote biodiversity, climate resilience, and sustainable farming.
- **Rural Vitality**: Improve infrastructure, services, and opportunities in rural areas.

02

Budget Highlights

- **Total CAP Envelope:** €865 billion via the National & Regional Partnership Fund
- **Ringfenced Income Support:** €295.7 billion
- **Unity Safety Net (Crisis Reserve):** €6.3 billion
- **Environmental Incentives:** New standalone environmental pillar proposed

03

Structural Reforms

- **Simplified Framework:**
  - Merging of CAP Pillars (EAGF & EAFRD)
  - Single rulebook for all CAP measures
- **Degressive Area-Based Payments:**
  - Payments capped at €100,000 per farmer
  - Reduced payments between €20,000–€100,000
- **Farm Stewardship:**
  - Replaces "conditionality" with protective environmental practices

04

Targeted Support

- **Young & Small Farmers:** Priority access to fully EU-financed support
- **Fairer Distribution:** Reduced aid for large farms, more equity across Member States
- **Flexible Implementation:** Member States tailor plans to local needs

05

Environmental Focus

- **Protective Practices:**
  - Soil health, water protection biodiversity
- **Voluntary Eco-Schemes:**
  - Greater rewards for sustainable innovation
- **Climate-Resilient Seeds & Tech:**
  - Supported via Horizon Europe & Competitiveness Fund

06

Rural Development

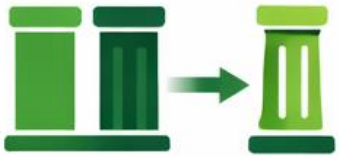
- **Integrated Funding:**
  - CAP aligned with cohesion, social, and innovation policies
- **Improved Services:**
  - Healthcare, childcare, education, digital access
- **Generational Renewal:**
  - Making rural life attractive for younger generations

CAP 2028–2034: What's Changing?



Single EU Fund

Economic, Social & Rural Development



Merged Pillars



€300 Billion
Income Support



€6.3 Billion
Safety Net



€865 Billion
Partnerships



More Flexibility



Innovation & Young Farmers

Unit 1 – REFLECTION ACTIVITY

Activity: Match the policy goal to its on-farm outcome.

Use the pairs below to understand how broad policy goals can be translated into concrete local actions.

Policy Goal	Possible Local Outcome
Reduce pesticide use by 50% (Farm-to-Fork 2030 target)	Local advisory service promotes integrated pest management workshops for small farms
Improve biodiversity and soil health (CAP 2023–2027 eco-scheme)	Cooperative launches a pollinator-friendly cover-crop initiative
Strengthen women's role in agriculture (CAP Objective 7: Social inclusion and equality)	EIP-AGRI project "Making Farms Work for Women" tests new inclusive farm models
Boost rural innovation (CAP Pillar II – Rural Development)	Local Action Group funds a shared digital hub for farm planning
Shorten food supply chains (Farm-to-Fork Action Plan)	Regional food network creates a farm-to-school procurement scheme

Call to action: Identify one CAP or Farm-to-Fork target that your organisation could address through a local project or training activity. Write one short paragraph explaining the target, the local need and one possible action.

Unit 1 –Test Your Knowledge

1.Question: What is the main goal of sustainable agriculture in the EU Green Deal?

A. Increase chemical use
B. Produce more plastic packaging
C. Protect nature and reduce pollution
D. Grow only one type of crop

2.Question: Why is healthy soil important during dry periods?

A. It grows faster plants
B. It stores more water
C. It reduces sunlight
D. It stops insects completely

3. Question: Why do biodiverse fields need fewer chemicals?

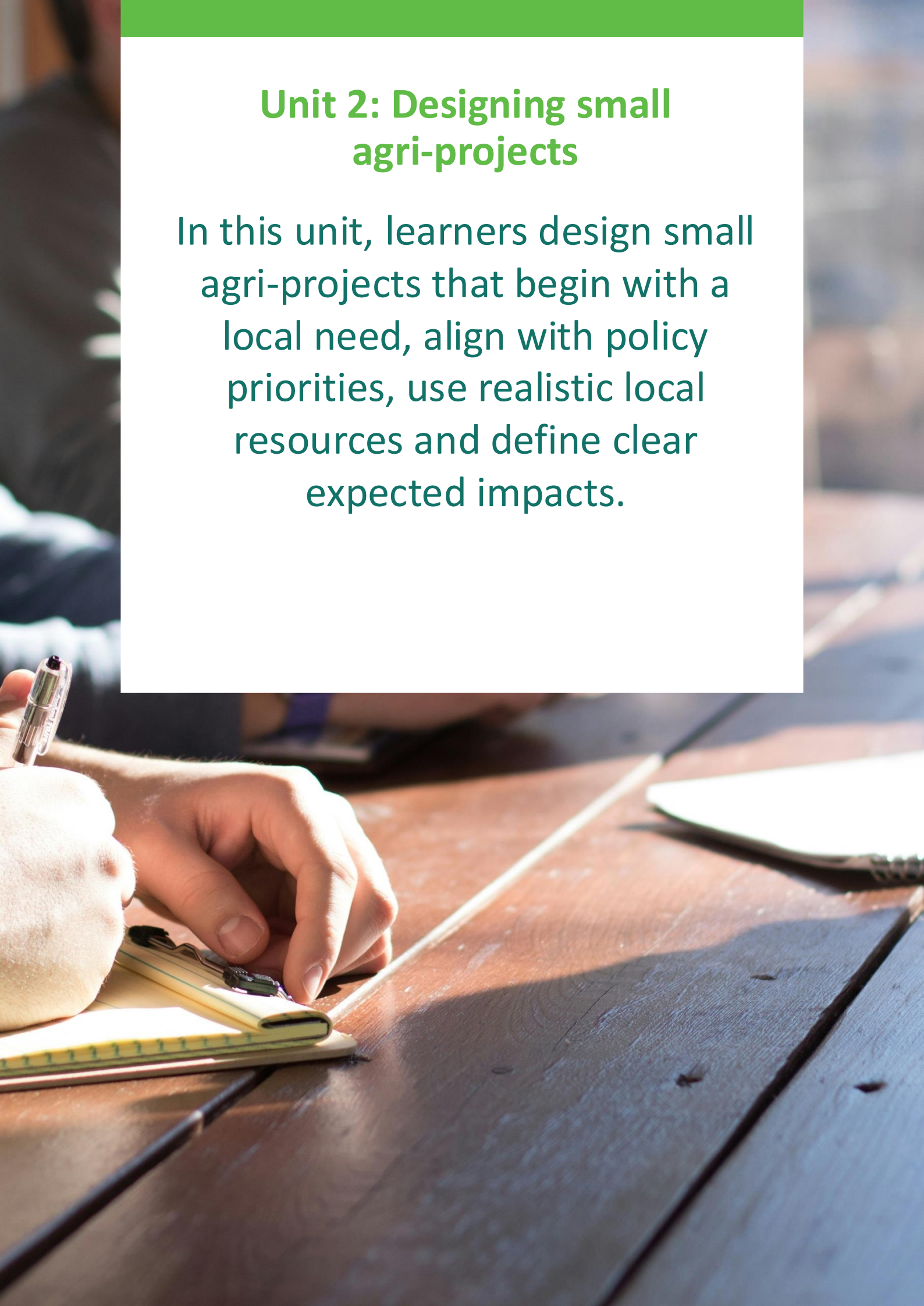
A. They attract tourists
B. They control pests naturally
C. They grow only trees
D. They use more machines

4.Question: What makes regenerative farming different?

A. It focuses only on short-term profit
B. It removes all natural plants
C. It improves the land every year
D. It uses more irrigation

Unit 2: Designing small agri-projects

In this unit, learners design small agri-projects that begin with a local need, align with policy priorities, use realistic local resources and define clear expected impacts.



Unit 2: Designing small agri-projects

A successful agri-project begins with a local need and ends with clear, measurable benefits for the community. As a regional agent, advisor or cooperative leader, your role is to help small farms shape ideas that are realistic, fundable and aligned with EU priorities.

1. Relevance: Start with the need
Identify a specific challenge that small or family farms face in your area. Ask what small farmers are saying and what data or observation confirms the issue. Use data, consultation or lived experience to show why the problem matters.

Example: Local vegetable growers lose income due to lack of cold storage for short supply chains.

2. Alignment: Link to policy priorities
Good projects do more than respond to a local need. They also show how the idea supports relevant policy priorities.

Learners should describe:

- Which CAP objective or Farm-to-Fork target the project supports.

- How the project contributes to EU ambitions.

Examples:

- No food hub -> CAP Objective 3: Strengthen the value chain.
- Low income for women farmers -> CAP Objective 7: Gender equality.
- Food waste -> Farm-to-Fork 2030 target.

Unit 2: Designing small agri-projects

From Local Need to EU Priority

Local Need	Matching Policy Objective	Example of Aligned Action
No local food hub	CAP Objective 3: Strengthen the value chain	Create shared cold storage and cooperative brand
Low income for women farmers	CAP Objective 7: Gender equality	Pilot EIP on women-led diversification
Food waste in rural markets	Farm-to-Fork 2030 target	Set up a “seconds to soups” value-added initiative

A successful agri-project begins with a local need and ends with clear, measurable benefits for the community. As a regional agent, advisor or cooperative leader, your role is to help small farms shape ideas that are realistic, fundable and aligned with EU priorities.

3. Feasibility: Plan with local resources

Feasibility is about realism. Many excellent ideas fail because they are too large, too costly or too dependent on outside expertise. This section helps regional development agencies and Local Action Groups support small farms in designing projects that fit local capacity.

Learners should analyse:

- What resources already exist.
- What partners can contribute.
- Whether the project fits a 12–18 month delivery window.

Example: Three neighbouring horticulture farms partner to pilot a shared washing and packing facility using existing equipment and one renovated shed.

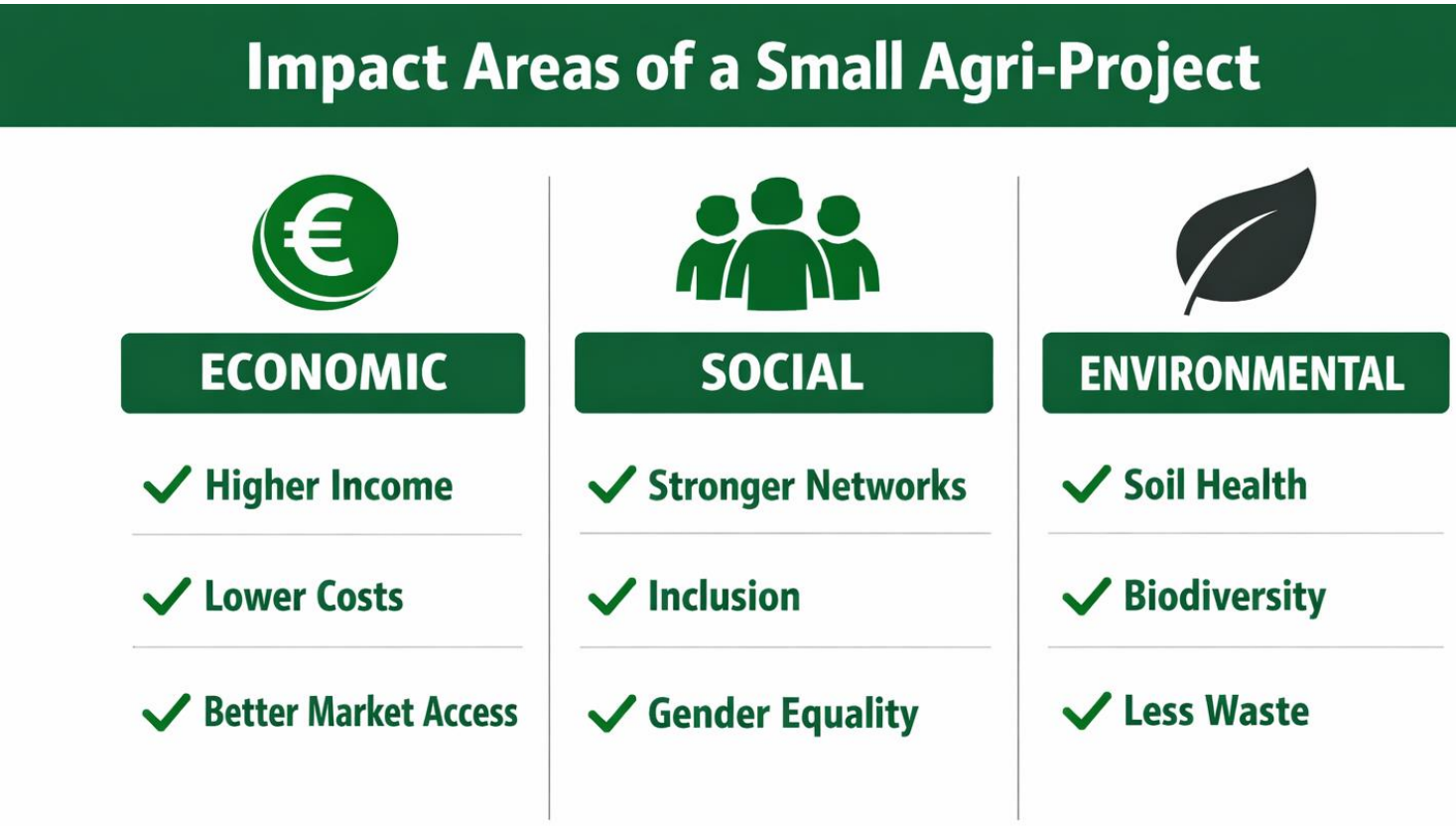
Unit 2: Designing small agri-projects

4. Impact: Define what success looks like

Describe the change you expect. Regional Development Agencies and Local Action Groups can help applicants describe changes clearly and measurably across three dimensions:

- **Economic**: new income sources, cost savings or better market access.
- **Social**: stronger networks, gender equality, inclusion or knowledge transfer.
- **Environmental**: improved resource efficiency, soil health, biodiversity or reduced waste.

Clear impact statements help funders see real results, stronger farms, fairer communities and more sustainable rural economies. *Example: 10 small farms gain new retail outlets and reduce waste by 15%.*



Unit 2 – Practical application block

Activity: Using the Smart4Food Project Canvas, draft your own one-page outline for a small agri-project.

Your concept should include:
Local need: What challenge are small or family farms facing?
Evidence: What data, consultation or observation shows that this problem matters?
Policy alignment: Which CAP objective, Farm-to-Fork target or national rural development priority does the project support?
Planned action: What practical activities will the project deliver?
Partners and resources: Who will contribute and what local resources already exist?
Feasibility: Can the project fit a realistic 12–18 month delivery window?
Expected impact: What economic, social or environmental change do you expect?

Call to action: Review open CAP, LEADER or national calls in your region. Identify where your draft project could fit and note what evidence or data you would need to apply.

project canvas

Project name _____

Project owner _____

Purpose

What is the intent of this project?
Why are we doing this project?

Scope

What does this project contain?
What does this project not contain?

Success Criteria

What do we need to achieve in order for the project to be successful?
How can the Success Criteria be measured?

Milestones

When will we start the project and when is the final deadline ?
What are the key milestones and when will they occur?
How can the milestones be measured?

Actions

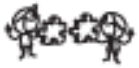
Which activities need to be executed in order to reach a certain milestone?

Outcome

What is the end result?
- A book
- A website
- An event

Team

Who are the team members?
What are their roles in the project?

Stakeholders

Who has an interest in the success of the project?
In what way are they involved in the project?

Users

Who will benefit from the outcome of the project?

Resources

What resources do we need in the project?
- Physical (office, building, server)
- Financial (money)
- Human (time, knowledge)

Constraints

What are the known limitations of the project?
- Physical (office, building, server)
- Financial (money)
- Human (time, knowledge, political

Risks

Which risks may occur during the project?
How do we treat these risks?

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Project Plan Self-Check Rubric

Use this checklist to review your draft project plan and identify areas needing more detail or alignment before submission.

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Section 1 | Project Definition

- ☐ Is the Project Name clearly stated and relevant? (Yes/No)
- ☐ Does the Purpose explain why the project matters and who benefits? (Yes/No)

Section 2 | Goals

- ☐ Are the Goals specific, measurable, and aligned with the EU Green Deal objectives? (Yes/No)
- ☐ Do the goals reflect both short-term and long-term outcomes? (Yes/No)

Section 4 | Stakeholders

- ☐ Are all relevant Stakeholders identified (farmers, cooperatives, agencies)? (Yes/No)
- ☐ Is there a plan for stakeholder engagement and communication? (Yes/No)

Section 3 | Key Activities

- ☐ Are the Key Activities listed and linked to achieving the goals? (Yes/No)
- ☐ Do activities include practical steps for farmers (e.g., training, guides, pilots)? (Yes/No)

Section 5 | Resources

- ☐ Are Resources Needed (materials, funding, expertise) clearly defined? (Yes/No)
- ☐ Is there an indication of how resources will be secured? (Yes/No

Section 6 | Timeline

- ☐ Is the Timeline realistic and broken into phases or milestones? (Yes/No)

Section 7 | Success Metrics

- ☐ Are Success Metrics clear and measurable (e.g., number of farmers trained)? (Yes/No)
- ☐ Do metrics align with project goals and purpose? (Yes/No

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Unit 2 –Test Your Knowledge

1. Question:What should a successful small agri-project begin with?

A. A large external budget
B. A specific local need
C. A long academic theory
D. A national advertising campaign

2. Question 2: Why should an agri-project link to CAP or Farm-to-Fork priorities?

A. To show how the project supports wider policy goals
B. To avoid defining local needs
C. To replace local partners
D. To make the project less measurable

3. Question 3: Which of the following is an example of an impact area for a small agri-project?

A. Economic, social or environmental change
B. Logo size and colour only
C. Number of office meetings only
D. Distance from the capital city only

Unit 3: Translating local evidence into policy influence

This unit shows how local project learning can become policy intelligence when it is framed clearly, connected to policy objectives and shared through structured feedback channels.



Unit 3: Translating local evidence into policy influence

Regional development agents, cooperative leaders and advisors operate at the point where local practice meets policy design. Their impact depends on how effectively they can translate lessons from local initiatives into clear, evidence-based insights that shape future rural development programmes.

1. From project learning to policy significance

Individual pilots generate fragmented results. Influence emerges when patterns are identified across regions or target groups. Farming and regional development actors can synthesise lessons on economic performance, behavioural shifts and partnership models into cross-cutting insights that reveal systemic barriers or enablers in the rural innovation landscape.

Useful resources mentioned in the source material include:

- European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) – Evaluation and Good Practices: case studies showing how local project evaluations feed into CAP policy improvements.
- Rural Observatory (European Commission): interactive maps and data visualisations showing rural trends across EU regions.
- Smart Rural 21 / Smart Rural 27 project examples: village-level innovation case studies translated into broader recommendations.

How Local Evidence Shapes Policy



Unit 3: Translating local evidence into policy influence

2. From evidence to framing

Evidence alone rarely shifts policy. Its influence depends on how it is framed in relation to EU objectives and political timing. Learners should translate results into the language of CAP Strategic Objectives, the Green Deal or Farm-to-Fork metrics such as carbon efficiency, circularity and equity.

Local findings should be positioned as solutions that help policymakers deliver on targets or simplify implementation.

3. From dissemination to institutional learning

Policy translation requires deliberate mechanisms such as briefing notes, technical working groups, CAP monitoring committees or inter-agency workshops.

Useful resources mentioned in the source material include:

- **European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP:** templates for policy briefs, evaluation guidelines and examples of how evidence shapes CAP amendments.
- **CAP Networks** – Good Practice Hubs: examples of how Member States structure policy learning from pilots.
- **Interreg Europe** – Policy Learning Platform: policy briefs and thematic workshops showing how regions turn project results into governance changes.

Unit 3: Translating local evidence into policy influence

4. From representation to co-creation

Co-creation can include joint drafting of measures, piloting regulatory flexibilities and testing funding models under real conditions.

- Living Labs for Green Transition (EIT Climate-KIC): examples of co-creation environments where local actors influence policy models.
- ACRE / Rural Regeneration case studies: examples of collaborative policymaking in rural co-creation contexts.

5. The feedback architecture

Effective systems maintain a feedback loop between micro-level innovation and macro-level policy. This can include:

- Structured data capture from pilots.
- Aggregation and synthesis across territories.
- Knowledge translation into concise policy briefs timed to decision points.
- Feedback integration during programme amendments or new calls.
- Agri-Food Data Portal, including the Agri Sustainability Compass and structural data on agriculture.

Unit 3 – Reflection activity

Activity: Adapt the Smart4Food Policy Insight Template using evidence from your own Smart4Food or regional projects.

Use the structure below to organise your policy insight.

Section	Example Entry – Digital Skills for Small Producers Pilot (Ireland)
Local Learning	Training delivered through community kitchens improved digital confidence among small food entrepreneurs. 82% now use online tools for marketing and traceability.
Policy Relevance	Supports CAP Strategic Objective 9 (strengthen rural employment and inclusion) and national Our Rural Future digitalisation goals.
Systemic Insight	Micro-level digital adoption depends on access to shared infrastructure and ongoing mentoring rather than one-off training.
Proposed Policy Adjustment	Introduce a flexible "Digital Continuity Grant" within LEADER to fund digital mentoring and infrastructure maintenance.
Timing / Entry Point	Feed into the 2026 LEADER mid-term review and CAP 2028–2034 preparatory consultations.

Micro-assessment: Self-assess or peer-review your draft within your regional network or Smart4Food partner lead.

Call to action: Identify one concrete step your organisation will take to embed this evidence into an upcoming policy discussion. For example, propose it for a CAP 2028–2034 thematic working group, brief a department official, or incorporate it into a joint position paper.

Unit 3 –Test Your Knowledge

1. Question: Why does local project evidence need to be framed clearly for policy influence?

A. Because evidence alone rarely shifts policy without being connected to policy objectives

B. Because policy influence should avoid real project results

C. Because local examples are never useful for policy design

D. Because only long academic reports can influence policy

2. Question: Which tool can help turn local project learning into a policy-relevant message?

A. A Smart4Food Policy Insight Template

B. A product price list only

C. A farm machinery catalogue

D. A weather diary only

3. Question

Which of the following is part of an effective feedback architecture?

A. Structured data capture from pilots

B. Avoiding synthesis across territories

C. Ignoring programme amendments

D. Sharing evidence only after decisions are finished

Unit 4: Building rural innovation networks

In this unit learners explore rural innovation networks as systems that connect farmers, cooperatives, digital hubs, research centres, funders, policymakers and communities to support sustainable rural transformation.



Unit 4: Building rural innovation networks

The future of rural development depends on networked rural innovation and ecosystem thinking. This means shifting from isolated projects to interconnected systems of innovation, learning and investment.

Regional Development Agencies and Local Action Groups are central to this transition because they can build bridges between farmers, cooperatives, digital hubs, research centres and government bodies that turn innovation into impact.

1. Purpose of rural innovation networks

Networks can:

- Accelerate knowledge flow and collective problem-solving.
- Enable small farms and local enterprises to access expertise, technologies and markets usually reserved for larger actors.
- Operate as learning systems that test ideas, share data and scale what works.

2. Core network functions:

- Knowledge exchange between practice, policy and academia.
- Joint experimentation through pilots, living labs or EIP-AGRI Operational Groups.
- Resource mobilisation by aligning CAP, Horizon, LEADER and regional funds for complementary use.
- Collective advocacy to ensure that lessons from innovation projects feed into policy reform.

3. Governance and leadership

Strong networks balance coordination and autonomy. Regional Development Agencies and Local Action Groups can:

- Nurture trust, clarify roles and ensure transparent decision-making.
- Use light but formalised structures, such as Memoranda of Cooperation, Innovation Steering Groups or regional Innovation Broker roles, to maintain commitment without unnecessary bureaucracy.

Unit 4: Building rural innovation networks

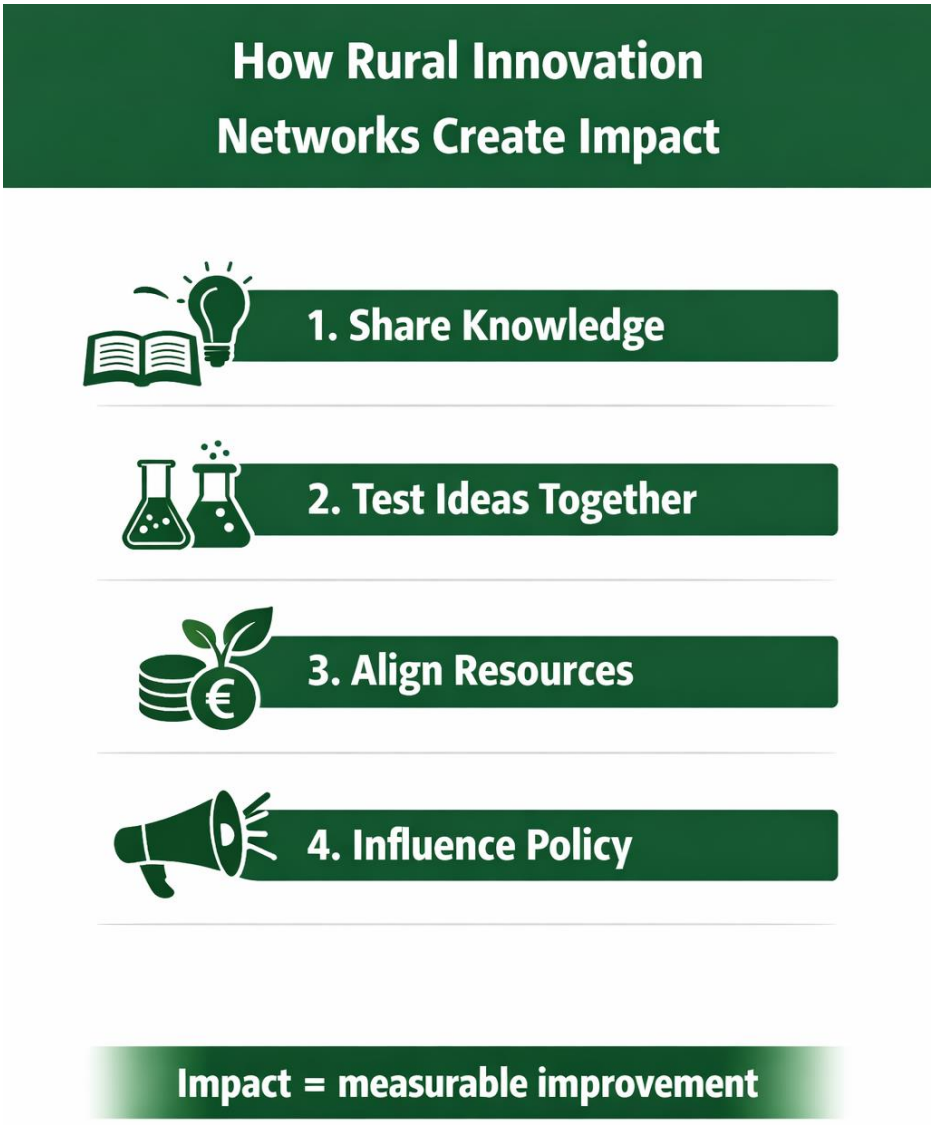
4. Diversity and inclusion

Innovation thrives on diversity of sectors, gender, scale and perspective. Inclusive networks engage underrepresented groups such as women, youth and migrant entrepreneurs as active contributors, not only as beneficiaries. Diversity improves creativity and ensures that innovations reflect real community needs.

5. Network sustainability

Beyond project funding, networks endure through shared ownership, joint value creation and reputation. Sustainability can be embedded by:

- Co-developing a shared vision and measurable outcomes.
- Creating blended funding models, including public, cooperative and private sources.
- Capturing and communicating impact regularly to retain stakeholder engagement.



Unit 2 – Practical application block

Learners use the Smart4Food Network Mapping Template to visualise existing and potential collaborations within their regional ecosystem. The template is pre-filled with an Irish example such as The North-West Bioeconomy Network.

MAPPING YOUR RURAL INNOVATION NETWORK

LOCAL NEED	NORTHWEST BIOECONOMY NETWORK				
PURPOSE	Create a regional innovation ecosystem linking small agri-processors, researchers, and local authorities around circular bioeconomy solutions.				
KEY ACTORS	Farmers, food SMEs, regional enterprise offices, universities, waste management agencies, and local authorities.				
KNOWLEDGE FLOW	Shared learning from Smart4Food and EIP-AGRI pilots and joint data repository on biomass use.				
POLICY INTERFACE	Regular input to the Western Development Commission and CAP Coordination Committee.				
SUSTAINABILITY MECHANISM	Annual membership model with co-funded demonstration projects.				

Unit 4 – Reflection activity

Activity: Build your network map.

Create a visual representation of your regional innovation network. Identify all the actors with whom you currently collaborate across the public, private, civic and research sectors. Then illustrate the flow of knowledge, funding and influence among them.

Mark where gaps exist and suggest one concrete step to strengthen the network. This could include convening a regional innovation roundtable, piloting an inter-LAG working group, or establishing a shared digital collaboration platform.

Expected output: A network map, either digital or paper-based, accompanied by a short paragraph describing the most important leverage point for improving innovation connectivity in your region.

Micro-assessment: Review your map using a checklist to ensure that the network is inclusive, resilient and designed for long-term impact.

Call to action: Share your network map and identify one opportunity for joint experimentation or resource alignment, such as a cross-regional pilot, a shared advisory role, or an inter-LAG policy paper. Commit to one practical next step within the next quarter, such as hosting a joint knowledge exchange workshop, developing a shared funding proposal, or integrating findings into a regional strategy.

Unit 4 –Test Your Knowledge

1. **Question: What is one main purpose of a rural innovation network?**

A. To isolate local projects from each other
B. To accelerate knowledge flow and collective problem-solving
C. To remove small farms from innovation activities
D. To focus only on individual competition

2. Question 2: Which of the following is a core function of rural innovation networks?

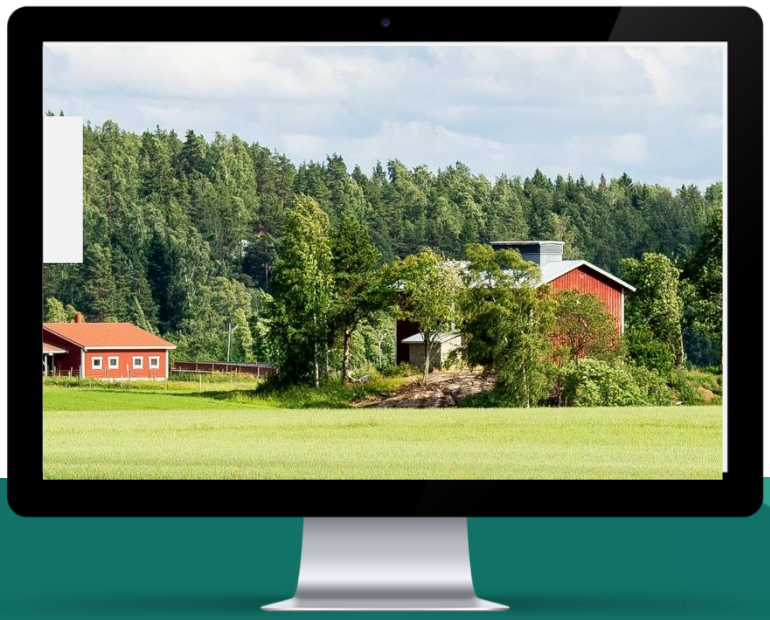
A. Knowledge exchange between practice, policy and academia
B. Avoiding collaboration with research institutions
C. Ending all joint experimentation
D. Reducing access to funding sources

3. Question 3: Why is diversity important in rural innovation networks?

A. It improves creativity and helps innovations reflect real community needs
B. It makes decision-making impossible
C. It replaces the need for governance
D. It limits participation to one sector only

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