

# Support of Learning and Innovation Networks for Sustainable Agriculture

The overall objective of this project was to identify effective and efficient approaches for the support of Learning and Innovation Networks for Sustainable Agriculture (LINSA) and to examine their potential as bottom-up drivers of transition.

To achieve the project objective, researchers collaborated with 17 LINSA across Europe using a transdisciplinary method based on participation, and examined 7 show cases.

Specifically, the project analysed how policy instruments, financial arrangements, research, education and advisory services might support LINSA in cost- efficient and effective ways. The consortium comprised 11 research institutions from 8 European countries.

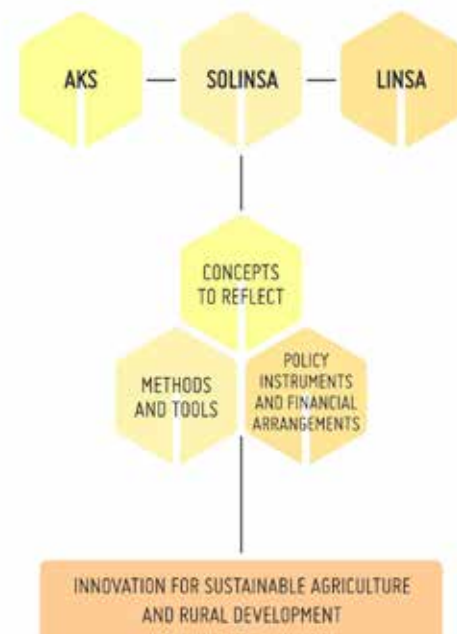
The SOLINSA project applied the transitions approach to agriculture and rural development. In agriculture, transition applies to a shift from the 'productivist regime', characterised by production growth, high yields, and input intensification, to a regime built around the principles of sustainable production. Innovation is key to transition, but the institutions that are charged with fostering innovation, the Agricultural Knowledge Systems (AKS), are often locked into old approaches and methods of intervention. The transition of European agriculture to sustainability therefore implies a transition from AKS to Agricultural Innovation Systems for Sustainability (AIS) which can foster innovation.



Farmers team together for sustainable production ©Tamarcaz

LINSA are defined as

*networks of producers, consumers, experts, NGOs, SMEs, local administrations as well as official researchers and extensionists, that are mutually engaged with common goals for sustainable agriculture and rural development - cooperating, sharing resources and co-producing new knowledge by creating conditions for communication (Brunori et al., 2013).*



SOLINSA aimed to:

- develop a conceptual framework for innovation for sustainable agriculture and rural development
- identify institutional determinants that enable or constrain existing AKS in supporting effective LINSA
- explore LINSA empirically as bottom-up drivers of transition
- improve understanding of barriers to complex learning processes and develop recommendations on how to remove them
- share and disseminate project findings and test practice-oriented results
- develop operational tools for relevant actors to support successful LINSA in terms of effective and efficient policy instruments and financial arrangements.

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## CCRI coordinated the LINSAs empirical analysis

Analysis in each LINSAs focused on the following analytical characteristics:

- perspectives on sustainable agriculture of the LINSAs
- scale, origin and function, and temporality of LINSAs
- mechanisms of network development, learning and innovation processes and connections with the formal AKS
- effective governance of LINSAs
- tasks, roles and emerging quality needs for the knowledge and skills of actors and institutions
- support measures which are most effective and cost efficient
- constraints and opportunities for LINSAs within their particular context and the support needs for successful LINSAs.

## Selected peer reviewed papers from the project

Brunori, G.; Barjolle, D., Dockes, A.-C., Helmle, S., Ingram, J., Klerkx, L., Moschitz, H., Nemes, G. and Tisenkopfs, T. (2013). CAP Reform and Innovation: The Role of Learning and Innovation Networks. *Eurochoices* 12 (2): 27–33

Curry, N. and Kirwan, J. (2014). The role of tacit knowledge in developing networks for sustainable agriculture. *Sociologia Ruralis* 54 (3): 341–361

Ingram J., Maye, D., Kirwan, J., Curry, N. and Kubinakova, K. (2014). Learning in the Permaculture Community of Practice in England: an analysis of the relationship between core practices and boundary processes. *Journal of Agricultural Education and Extension* 20 (3): 275–290

Ingram J., Maye, D., Kirwan, J., Curry, N. and Kubinakova, K. (forthcoming). Interactions between niche and regime: an analysis of Learning and Innovation Networks for Sustainable Agriculture across Europe. *Journal of Agricultural Education and Extension*

All results are available at [www.solinsa.net](http://www.solinsa.net)



Bavarian Rural Womens Association, Germany ©University of Hohenheim

## Recommendations

Studies undertaken in the project highlighted the need for a change in perspective that concerns all actors of the AKS (advisory services, education and training, research) as well as policy makers. Recommendations include:

- acknowledge the diversity of LINSAs
- consider and accept LINSAs as drivers of transition towards sustainability
- assist LINSAs in strengthening their organisation, and in building capacity and skills for developing over the long term
- assist LINSAs in accessing funding, as LINSAs evolve, their support needs, and relevant activities to address those needs, change
- carefully develop and manage the links between LINSAs and AKS; acknowledge and use different ways of collaboration with LINSAs
- acknowledge the variety of existing knowledge; knowledge needs and sources involved in creation and dissemination of innovation in agriculture
- foster needs-based, diverse, participatory learning forms; mutuality and diversity of interactions with actors in agricultural innovation systems
- shift self-perception and attitude from an expert knowledge provider to transition partner.

There is no 'one size fits all' approach to supporting LINSAs. Yet the project developed recommendations for education and training, advisory services and extension, researchers and research policy taking into account the current EU research and innovation policy context. (Horizon 2020; EIP Agricultural Production and Sustainability).

## Selected outputs and Deliverable reports (CCRI authored)

SOLINSAs Special Issue (in press) *Journal of Agricultural Education and Extension*

Ingram, J., Curry, N., Kirwan, J., Maye, D. and Kubinakova, K. (2013a). WP4 Synthesis Report. SOLINSAs project Deliverable 4.2a, October 2013. Available at [www.solinsa.net](http://www.solinsa.net)

Ingram, J., Curry, N., Kirwan, J., Maye, D. and Kubinakova, K. (2013b). WP4 Analytical Characteristics Report. SOLINSAs project Deliverable 4.2b, October 2013. Available at [www.solinsa.net](http://www.solinsa.net)



Permaculture meeting in England ©Permaculture Association