

Future-proofing EU Agri-Food through research and innovation

Summary of results
of the open consultation

April 2026



Future-proofing EU Agri-Food through research and innovation: Summary of results of the open consultation

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This document should be regarded solely as a summary of the contributions made by stakeholders to the open consultation. It cannot in any circumstances be regarded as an official position of the Commission or its services.

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1 Introduction

The new EU strategic approach to research and innovation (R&I) for competitive, resilient and sustainable agriculture, forestry and rural areas will provide an updated, inclusive and actionable framework to support competitive, resilient and sustainable agri-food systems, forests and rural communities across the Union. It will update and replace the [current strategic approach for agricultural R&I](#), from 2016, and will contribute to achieving the objectives set out in the [Vision for agriculture and food](#).

To support the preparation of this new strategic approach, **an open consultation** was conducted to collect feedback from a broad **stakeholder community**. The feedback collected through the survey provides an important input into the strategic approach by helping to identify key **challenges, opportunities and priority R&I areas**. In particular, it informs work on strengthening the **uptake of knowledge and innovation by farmers, foresters and rural actors**, and on improving the **innovation pathway from research to start-ups and scale-ups**, for the benefit of the wider EU economy and the **competitiveness, sustainability, resilience and fairness** of these sectors.

Combining **closed and open questions**, the survey enabled a **quantitative analysis and provided qualitative insights** and was structured around **five areas**:

- (1) research and Innovation as an enabler of the Vision for agriculture and food
- (2) strengthening the EU “R&I ecosystem” for researchers, innovators, start-ups, scale-ups and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in agriculture, forestry and rural areas
- (3) accelerating the uptake of (new) knowledge and innovation in agriculture, forestry and rural areas
- (4) fostering cooperation for R&I that supports competitive, resilient and sustainable agri-food systems in Europe and beyond; and
- (5) thematic priorities and approaches for future R&I.

The survey was **launched on 15 December 2025** at the [EU Agri-Food Days 2025](#), during the session on “The future of EU agri-food: data & innovation for food security”, and was thoroughly promoted including via the AGRI website, social media and direct stakeholder outreach. The survey was **closed on 25 January 2026**. A total of **701 replies** to the survey were received¹.

¹ After data cleaning.

2 Stakeholders' Profile

Figure 1 presents the breakdown of stakeholders' profiles. The largest group of respondents was from **academic and research institutions** (269, 38.4%), followed by **citizens** (104, 14.8%). **Companies and businesses** (including SMEs, start-ups and scale-ups), together with **business associations**, accounted for 11.4% of contributions (63 companies and businesses and 17 business associations). **Farmer, forester and rural organisations** (57), together with **farmer, forester and rural actors** (37), represented 13.4% of responses. Further submissions were received from **public authorities** (55, 7.8%), **non-governmental organisations** (54, 7.7%), one **consumer association** (0.1%) and 44 respondents identified as "Other" (6.3%).

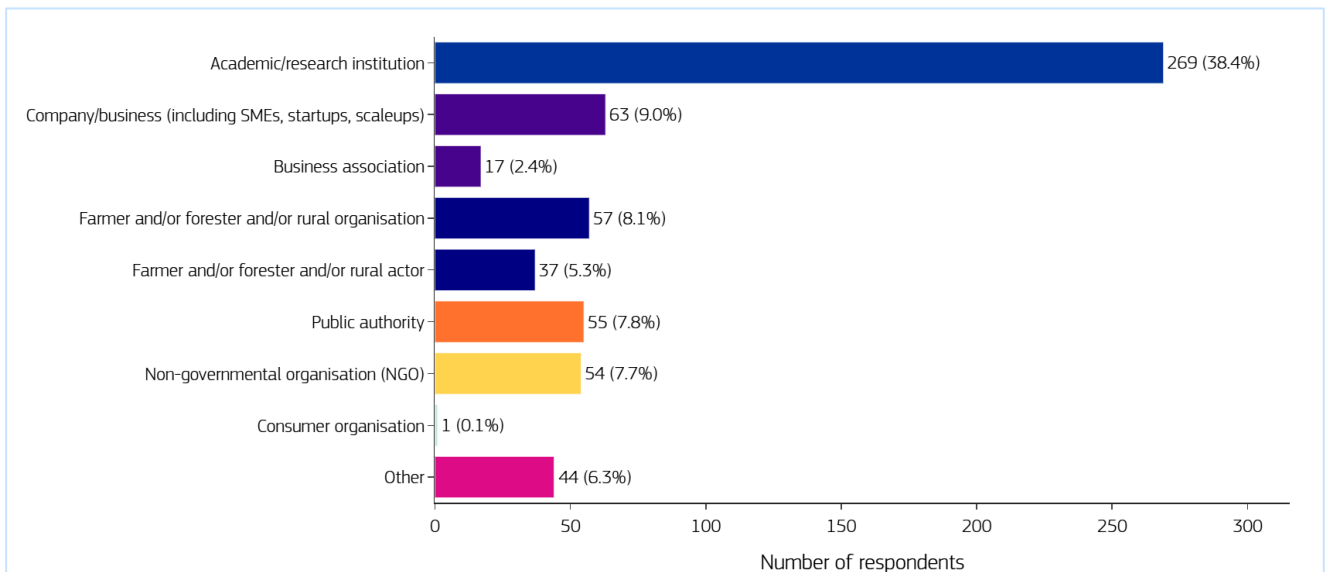


Figure 1 Stakeholder profile of survey respondents, showing that academic/research institutions (38.4%) and individual citizens (14.8%) represent the largest groups, followed by companies, farmers/foresters, public authorities, NGOs and other organisations.

Organisation size: A total of 589 respondents were organisations. Further analysis shows that **large organisations** (250 or more employees) accounted for 45% of responses, mainly academic and research institutions as well as public authorities. While **micro-organisations** (1-9 employees) represented 26% of responses and were mainly farmers, foresters and rural actors (Figure 2 and Figure 3).

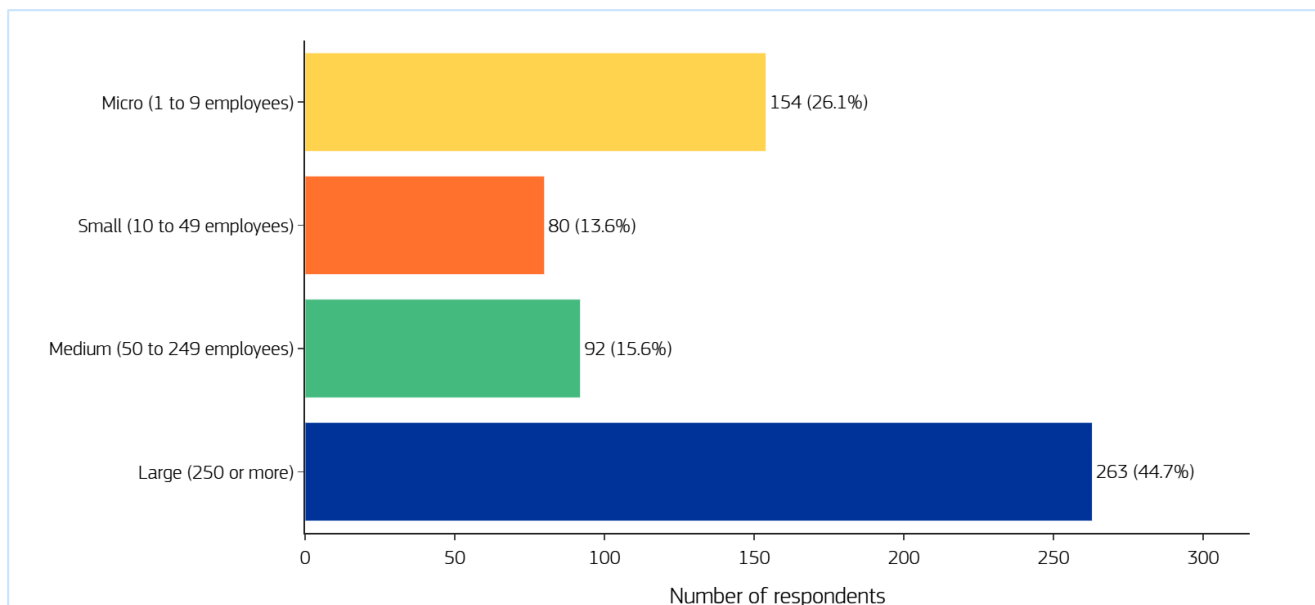


Figure 2 Distribution of the 589 responding organisations by size, showing that almost half are large organisations (263; 44.7%), with the remainder split between micro (154; 26.1%), medium (92; 15.6%) and small (80; 13.6%) entities.

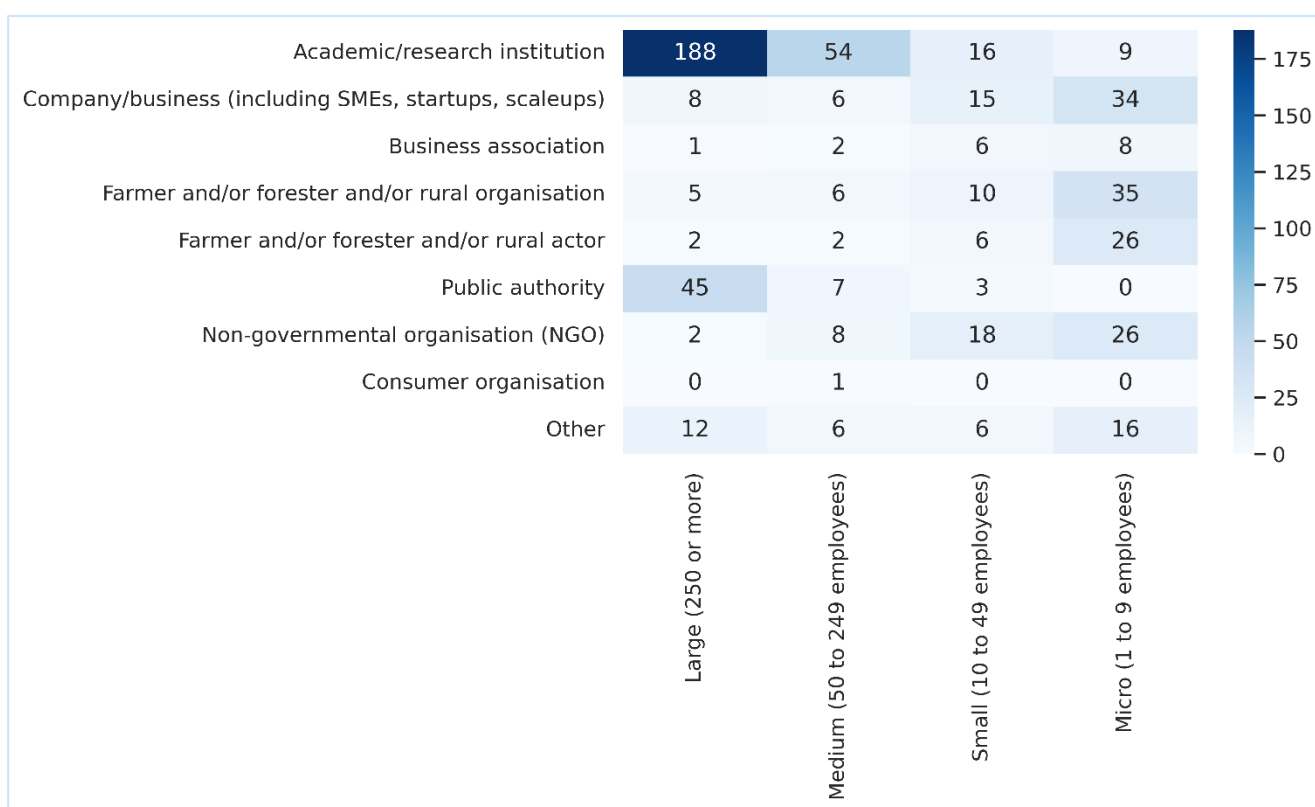


Figure 3 Distribution of respondents by stakeholder type and organisation size, showing that academic/research institutions and public authorities are predominantly large organisations, while farmers, businesses and NGOs are mainly micro and small entities.

The geographical coverage spanned all EU-27 Member States, which together accounted for 92% of replies (643). The main contributors were **Germany** (14%), **Poland** (11%) and **Belgium** (10%, including Brussels-based- EU and global organisations), while **France**, **Portugal**, **Spain** and **Italy** together represented 31% of responses (Figure 4).

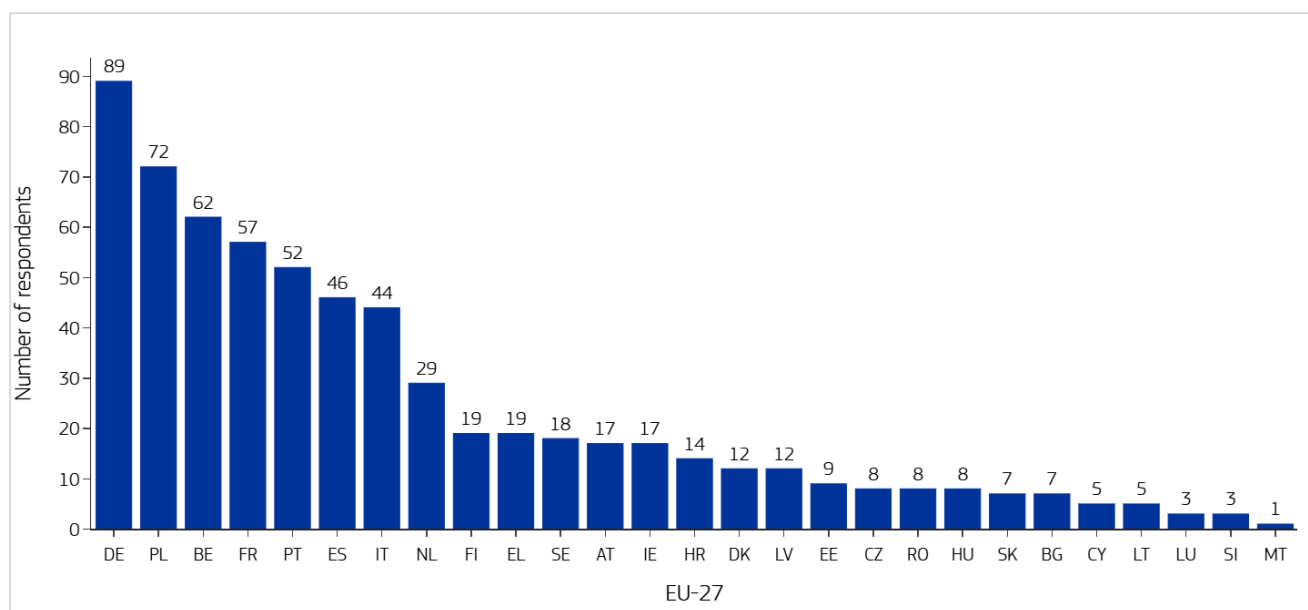


Figure 4 Distribution of survey respondents across the EU-27 (n=643), representing 92% of the total replies. The highest participation came from Germany, Poland, Belgium, France and Portugal, with contributions from all other Member States at lower levels.

Outside the EU-27, an additional 17 replies were received from **Horizon Europe-associated countries**², including 11 **EU Candidate Countries**. Finally, 13 respondents were from **non-European countries** that are **not associated to Horizon Europe**³.

3 Main Results

This section presents the main findings from the open consultation across the five areas, drawing on both a quantitative analysis and a review of qualitative inputs.

3.1 R&I as an enabler of the Vision for agriculture and food

The current [Strategic Approach to EU agricultural research and innovation](#), from 2016, aimed to harness EU R&I Framework Programme investments to address **four objectives**: (1) ensure long-term food security; (2) address the environmental sustainability and resilience of competitive land-based primary production for food and non-food systems; (3) boost the sustainable growth of rural territories; and (4) improve the delivery of research results for policymaking. **These four objectives** were considered still **highly or somewhat relevant by up to 92% of respondents**.

Respondents were then asked to assess the extent to which a new Strategic Approach to EU R&I in agriculture, forestry and rural areas should contribute to:

- attracting **new generations** to agriculture and rural areas;
- strengthening the **competitiveness** of small and medium-sized farm holders;
- fostering the **economic, environmental and social sustainability** of agricultural sectors crucial for the EU economy and able to adapt to future changes;
- enabling agricultural systems that work in **harmony with nature**;
- leveraging the potential of **innovative technologies**, such as biotechnology and artificial intelligence;

² Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Albania, Türkiye, Serbia, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Switzerland, United Kingdom, Israel, Norway, and Iceland.

³ Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana, Cameroon, Niger, Ethiopia, Malawi, Central African Republic, Brazil, Cuba, USA, Pakistan and India.

- accelerating the **uptake of innovation** in agriculture, forestry and rural areas;
- providing new **business models** for farmers, foresters and rural actors;
- generating new opportunities through **bioeconomy**, circularity and nature-based solutions towards a climate-neutral and nature-positive economy;
- fostering the **cocreation** of knowledge and innovation in local experimentation sites;
- strengthening **knowledge and innovation systems** in agriculture and support for advisory services; and addressing **consumer needs** and choices that affect the competitiveness, sustainability and resilience of agriculture.

Respondents considered it important that the new Strategic Approach address all these **priority areas**, with up to **94%** supporting an extension of its scope to cover the above-listed areas, signalling broad agreement on a more **comprehensive** and **forward-looking** agenda.

When invited, in an open question, to indicate **other aspects to which the new Strategic Approach should contribute**, **89** respondents (12.7%) highlighted, among others, the need to address **regional disparities in research and innovation** within the EU, to encourage **societal participation** (including **citizen science**), to recognise **community-led initiatives**, and to better take into account **food sovereignty**, **market demands** and the wider **value chain** beyond the farm level.

3.2 Strengthening the EU “R&I ecosystem” for researchers, innovators, start-ups, scale-ups and SMEs in agriculture, forestry and rural areas

The consultation examined stakeholders’ views on whether the current **EU R&I ecosystem**⁴ sufficiently supports the **valorisation** of results through the **creation and scaling of start-ups**, **SME development**, **strategic infrastructure** investments and **seamless investment journeys** from research to commercialisation. Respondents were largely critical of the existing mechanisms: only **31%** considered that there is adequate support for a seamless investment journey, pointing to systemic shortcomings in the valorisation of R&I results in agriculture, forestry and rural areas.

Stakeholders were asked to assess **proposals to foster a seamless investment journey** in the EU R&I ecosystem for agriculture, forestry and rural areas. This included measures to **strengthen project valorisation funding** (for example, dedicated proof-of--concept support), to expand and better coordinate EU support for start-ups, scale-ups and SMEs, and to create tighter **synergies across funding instruments** (Horizon Europe⁵, the future European Competitiveness Fund⁶ and National and Regional Partnership Plans⁷). These proposals also included: making greater and more systematic use of EU instruments targeted at start-ups, scaleups and SMEs in these sectors; ensuring that results from EU-funded collaborative R&I actions feed more systematically into such instruments; and more active participation of innovative companies in EU-funded -research and innovation projects. Up to **82% of respondents** strongly or somewhat agreed with the proposed actions to foster a seamless investment journey (Figure 5).

⁴ For the purpose of this survey, the “EU research and innovation ecosystem” should be understood as the financial and infrastructural context provided by EU policies that enable the development of R&I activities, from basic research to the deployment and upscaling of innovations in the market.

⁵ The next Horizon Europe, proposed under the next Multiannual Financial Framework (2028–2034), will continue funding world-class research and innovation.

⁶ The European Competitiveness Fund (ECF), proposed under the next Multiannual Financial Framework (2028–2034), will invest in strategic sectors and technologies and simplify and accelerate EU funding.

⁷ The next Multiannual Financial Framework (2028–2034) will bring together EU funds implemented by Member States and Regions under one coherent strategy, with economic, social and territorial cohesion, agricultural and fisheries policies and security at its core. This will be implemented through National and Regional Partnership Plans, to maximize the impact of investments.

In response to an open question, 42 respondents (6%) proposed a range of **additional ways to strengthen valorisation** and support a seamless investment journey. Among the ideas put forward, respondents stressed that the valorisation of R&I should go beyond traditional lab-t-o-market models and make valorisation a core design feature of R&I projects, by **integrating market-oriented activities earlier in projects** and supporting low cost, practical innovations. Participants further called for **increased EU funding to be channelled directly to farmers** for implementing and adapting research outcomes, recognising them as **co-owners of innovation**. Respondents also suggested to support long-term pilots and multi-year on-farm experiments to gather robust real-world datasets.

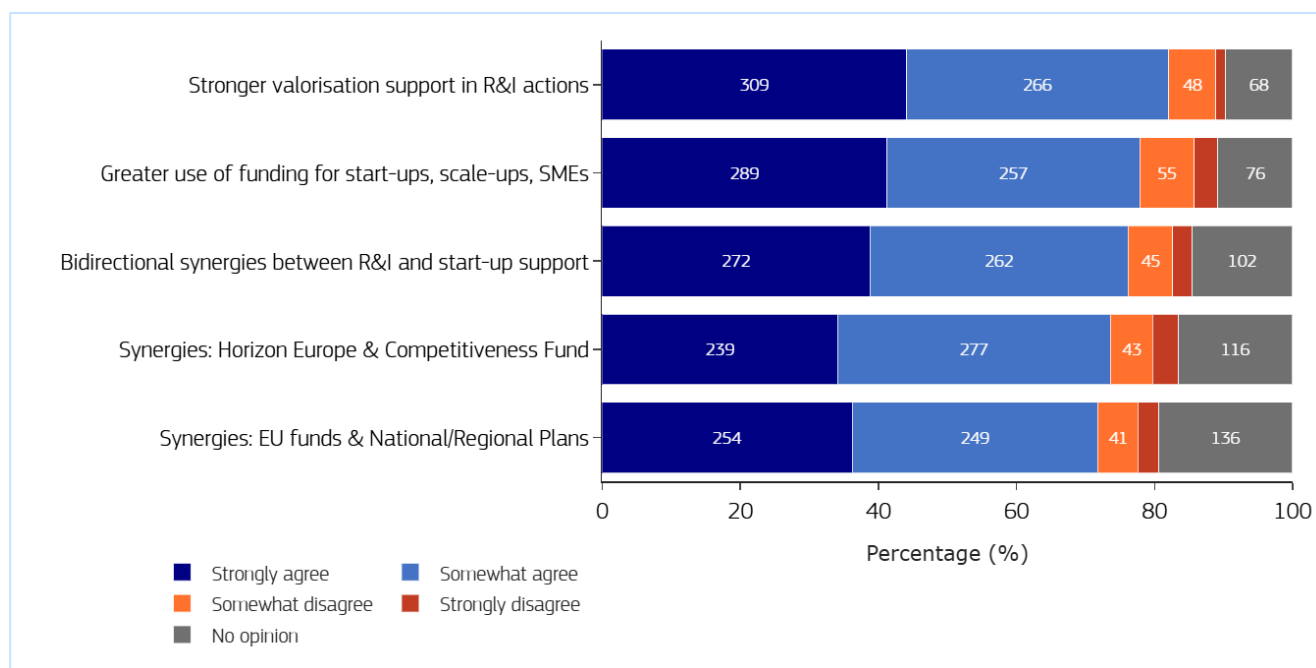


Figure 5 Respondents' views on proposed measures to strengthen support and synergies for start-ups, scale-ups and SMEs across EU funding instruments, showing broad support across all options, with around three quarters or more combining "strongly agree" and "somewhat agree" for each measure.

3.3 Accelerating the uptake of knowledge and innovation (agriculture, forestry, rural areas)

The EU promotes an **interactive innovation model** through Horizon Europe and the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), **based on co-creation**, complementary expertise and responding to the concrete needs of farmers, foresters and rural communities. Central to this model is the **multi-actor approach**⁸, which is designed to make research and innovation more inclusive, demand-driven and relevant to society. In practice, **multi-actor R&I projects** and **EIP-AGRI Operational Groups**⁹ bring together actors with different types of expertise to **co-create practical solutions** and **support the uptake** of innovation in agriculture, forestry and rural areas.

Respondents evaluated whether **farmers, foresters and rural actors** can quickly access and effectively use **R&I results** — for example, through adequate support to adopt new knowledge, practices and technologies, fast and effective **communication and dissemination**, access to **affordable, context-specific innovations**, and **opportunities to test and implement** them. Respondents were largely critical of the existing mechanisms: only up to **36%** strongly or somewhat agreed on the current effectiveness of

⁸ https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/overview-vision-agriculture-food/research-innovation/multi-actor-approach_en

⁹ https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/operational-groups_en

dissemination, take-up and use of R&I results in agriculture, forestry and rural areas, revealing a clear need for action to **accelerate the uptake of knowledge and innovation in these areas**.

Respondents assessed a range of options to stimulate the uptake of innovation by farmers, foresters, rural actors, food chain operators, institutions and civil society, including the wider use and further development of the **multi-actor approach**, the broader deployment of **cascading grants** and **living labs**, and stronger bidirectional links between **EU-funded R&I actions** and **CAP EIP-AGRI Operational Groups**. Further proposed measures in the survey included enhancing **dissemination and exploitation** (including via **digital technologies**, **on farm demonstrations**, and **peer-to-peer activities**), reinforcing connections with **AKIS**, **advisory services** and **Horizon thematic networks**, and compiling **AI accessible inventories** of agricultural and forestry practices. **Up to 88%** of respondents strongly or somewhat agreed with the proposed solutions (Figure 6).

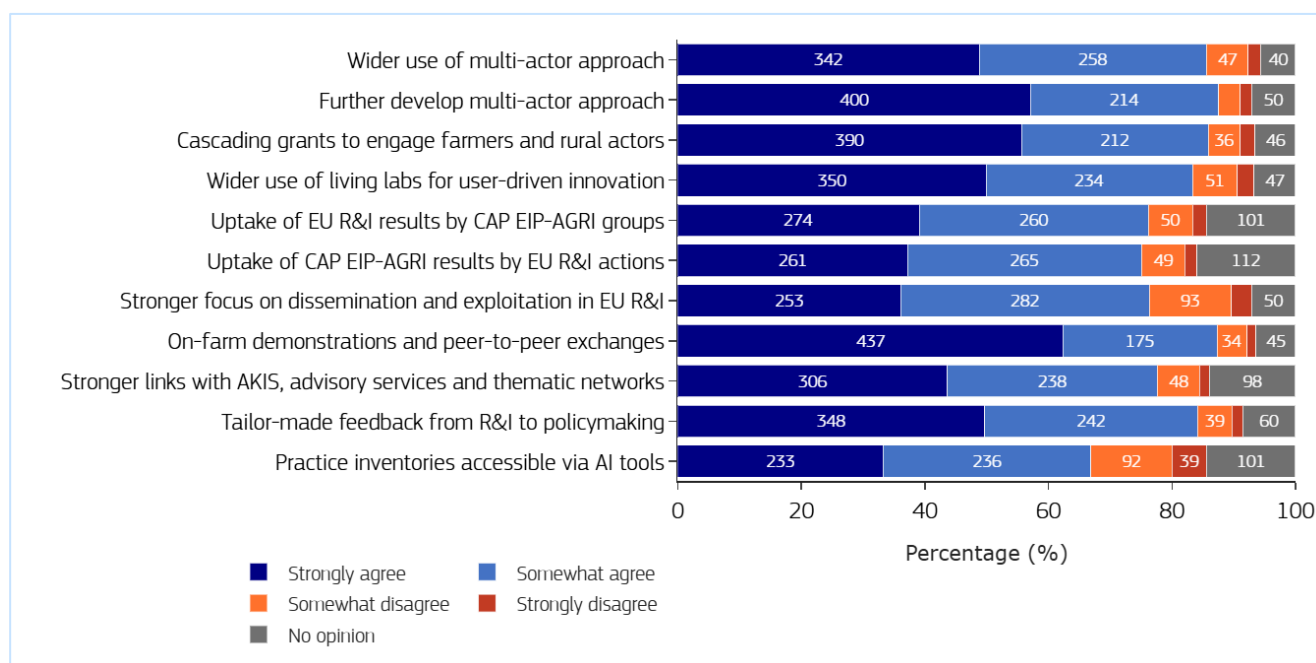


Figure 6 Respondents' views on options to stimulate the uptake of innovation, showing broad support across all measures, with around 70–85% combining “strongly agree” and “somewhat agree” and the highest support for on-farm demonstrations, further development of the multi-actor approach, and wider use of cascading grants.

When replying to an open question, 248 respondents (35.4%) proposed a range of additional means to strengthen **innovation uptake**. Among the ideas suggested were targeted **incentives** to reward early adopters (for example through **CAP instruments**, **risk-sharing mechanisms** and **outcome-based payments**), enhanced **education and capacity building**, greater **engagement** of farmers, advisors and end-users in real life contexts, and closer **alignment** of research outcomes with **territorial needs**.

3.4 Strengthening R&I cooperation at EU and international level

Respondents were asked to assess how different forms of cooperation could strengthen **research and innovation (R&I)** at **EU and international level** to address global challenges in agriculture, forestry and rural areas.

Respondents evaluated four options: closer **public-public cooperation** and alignment of agendas between the EU, Member States and Associated Countries; enhanced **public-private collaboration** with business and philanthropic actors; deeper **partnerships with international organisations and third countries**; and stronger **cross-disciplinary and cross sectoral collaboration** (for example on One Health,

the **bioeconomy**, **biotechnology** and the **blue economy**). Up to **88% of the respondents** strongly or somewhat agreed with these four proposed mechanisms.

In addition, via an open question, **181 respondents** (25.8%) suggested further ways to reinforce cooperation. These included, for example, enhancing the **mobility of researchers**, improving access to shared **research infrastructures** and ensuring **data interoperability** across borders; securing the stronger engagement of **smaller countries**; moving towards more **mission-oriented partnerships**; and recognising the importance of **international collaboration** to address global agricultural challenges such as **pests**, **diseases** and **climate-induced risks to yields**.

3.5 Thematic priorities and approaches for future R&I

Stakeholders were invited to assess the 13 **research and innovation priority areas** identified at the [2023 AgriResearch Conference](#):

- climate mitigation and adaptation;
- biodiversity-friendly agriculture;
- sustainable management of land, soil, water and nutrients;
- healthy, sustainable and resilient cropping systems;
- sustainable and healthy livestock systems;
- new farming, food and biobased systems;
- rural opportunities; agroecology and organic farming;
- socioeconomics and agricultural policies;
- sustainable and resilient forests and forestry;
- supporting agricultural knowledge and innovation systems;
- digital and data technologies; and
- international aspects.

Across all those 13 areas, nearly all stakeholders confirmed their current **relevance** for strengthening the **attractiveness, competitiveness, sustainability, resilience and fairness** of agriculture, forestry and rural areas.

When consulted, through an open question, on **additional thematic priorities** to strengthen the **attractiveness, competitiveness, sustainability, resilience and fairness** of agriculture, forestry and rural areas, **248 respondents** (35.4%) highlighted further areas. These included themes such as **carbon farming**, circular **agri-food systems**, **agroforestry**, **plant breeding**, as well as addressing issues related to **labour, generational change and training**.

