

## Improving meat quality of pigs and broiler chickens

Investigating the connection between extensive husbandry practices and the quality of pork and broiler meat

To meet the demands of European citizens, mEATquality is a Horizon 2020 research project that analyses consumer attitudes, perceptions, and preferences regarding sustainable meat production. The project is looking into the housing and management of two intensively kept livestock species: broiler chickens and pigs. “Changes in animal housing systems are expected in the coming years to comply with future updates of EU animal welfare legislation and to meet consumer demand for more sustainable pork and poultry meat from environmentally and welfare-friendly production systems,” project partner Paolo Ferrari explains. The project focuses on the direct impact that certain critical factors related to extensive husbandry practices such as diet, genetics and stocking density, can have on the meat quality.

The overall ambition of the mEATquality project is to provide consumers with better quality pork and broiler meat, covering conventional farms, organic farms and free-range systems. The project aims to do this by promoting extensive husbandry practices that consider both sustainability and animal welfare. The project aims to inform consumers on the relationship between production methods and the quality of the pork and broiler meat through educational tutorials, videos, the EU Meat Database and by sharing the best practices.

“Our food systems are constantly evolving, and so is the information that consumers get on meat products. Ensuring that they get the right information on the way meat is produced in relation to the quality of the product is very important: it allows them to make conscious decisions in the supermarket,” says Hans Spoolder, project coordinator.

For example, the mEATquality Sustainability App, to be released in 2025, will advise pig and broiler producers on the extensification of their farming systems and present “what if” options for their particular cases.

## Background information

According to the latest [Eurobarometer \(2023\)](#), most European citizens believe that the welfare of farmed animals should be better protected in their country than it is now. The European Commission and farmers are already working to upgrade EU animal welfare rules, in line with the latest scientific evidence and in a way that works for both farmers and the livestock sector. In many countries, there is a trend towards more conscious meat consumption, explained by consumers’ growing awareness of quality, sustainability and animal welfare.

EU animal welfare legislation: [Animal welfare - European Commission](#)

Users of the app are asked to reply to a list of specific questions related to husbandry practices, environmental management and to the farm’s economic resilience. The tool will benchmark farms and transfer knowledge between them. It will inform producers about how to make their farms more sustainable in terms of animal welfare, economic and environmental aspects. The app will give producers the most efficient ‘formula’, combining the four husbandry factors addressed by mEATquality: genetics, forage, quality of space and space allowance.

Finally, the project partners will create a new protocol to assess the farm’s economic resilience, not only in terms of economic performance but also in terms of farmers’ capacity to adapt to economic stresses such as the volatility of input and output prices or changes in market demand. Additionally, an innovative technique will be developed to analyse stress hormones in broiler feathers and pig hair of animals exposed to different levels of extensivity. This new laboratory analysis will become a tool to support farmers in assessing and monitoring animal welfare for farm advice and/or certification.



In November 2024, the [EU CAP Network Focus Group ‘Alternative solutions for livestock product differentiation’](#) will have its first meeting. Twenty European Focus Group experts with different professional backgrounds will debate which approaches exist to differentiate livestock products for enhanced market diversification and to create new business models.

- > [Project website](#)
- > [Project video](#)
- > [X](#)
- > [LinkedIn](#)

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### Project information

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### Project photos:

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### More information on animal husbandry

#### EU CAP Network 'Innovation & knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI' activities

##### Focus Groups

- > [Focus Group Reducing antibiotics in pig farming](#)
- > [Focus Group Reducing antimicrobial use in poultry farming](#)
- > [Focus Group Sustainable Beef Production Systems](#)
- > [Focus Group New feed for pigs and poultry](#)
- > [Focus Group Reducing Emissions from Cattle farming](#)
- > [Focus Group Mixed Farming Systems: Livestock/cash crops](#)
- > [Focus Group Robust and resilient dairy production systems](#)

##### Events

- > [EU CAP Network Workshop 'Animal welfare and innovation'](#)

##### Publications & videos

- > [EIP-AGRI Brochure Sustainable livestock farming](#)
- > [EIP-AGRI Brochure on Reducing antibiotics in pig farming](#)
- > [EIP-AGRI Brochure Sustainable and resilient farming](#)
- > [Factsheet: Animal Welfare and innovation](#)
- > [AGRI Challenge video - Reducing antimicrobial use in poultry farming](#)
- > [EIP AGRI Challenge video - Animal welfare and innovation](#)

##### Inspirational ideas from the network

- > [Smart barn makes for happy pigs \(The Netherlands\)](#)
- > [Inspirational idea: Organic experimental farm in Finland testing methods for improved animal welfare \(Finland\)](#)
- > [Inspirational idea: A national network stimulating knowledge exchange on animal welfare in Germany \(Germany\)](#)

##### Operational Groups

513 Operational Groups working on Animal Husbandry are available in the [EIP-AGRI project database](#) (update July 2024)

#### Horizon multi-actor projects

- > [INTAQT](#) (2020-2024) - Assessing the relationship between animal production systems and the quality of the products they produce, particularly in the poultry and beef sector

**Multi-actor projects** are research and innovation projects in which end users and multipliers of research results, such as farmers and farmers' groups, advisors, enterprises and others, closely cooperate throughout the whole project. Operational Groups are strongly encouraged to participate in this type of research project.

- > [TechCare](#) (2020-2024) - Integrating innovative technologies along the value chain to improve small ruminant welfare management
- > [PPILOW](#) (2019-2024) Poultry and Pig Low-input and Organic production systems' Welfare
- > [Clearfarm](#) (2019-2023) Co-designed Welfare Monitoring Platform for Pig and Dairy Cattle
- > [BovINE](#) (2020-2022) BovINE Beef Innovation Network Europe
- > [Hennovation](#) (2015-2017) (2020-2022) Practice-led innovation supported by science and market-driven actors in the laying hen and other livestock sectors
- > [LIFT](#) (COST action; 2022-2026) Lifting farm animal lives - laying the foundations for positive animal welfare
- > [IPEMA](#) (COST action; 2016-2020) Innovative Approaches in Pork Production with Entire Males
- > [aWISH](#) (2022-2026) Animal Welfare Indicators at the Slaughterhouse. Automated monitoring at the slaughterhouse of complementary, animal-based indicators for monitoring welfare on the farm, during (un)loading, transport and slaughter. Piloting and development in broiler and fattening pig production chains

**Thematic networks** are multi-actor projects which collect existing knowledge and best practices on a given theme to make this available in easily understandable formats for end-users such as farmers, foresters, advisors etc.

- > [DISARM](#) (01/2019-12/2021) - Disseminating Innovative Solutions for Antibiotic Resistance Management
- > [EuroSheep](#) (01/2020-12/2022) - European Network for interactive and innovative knowledge exchange on animal health and nutrition between the sheep industry actors and stakeholders
- > [EU PiG](#) (11/2016-10/2020) - EU Pig Innovation Group

In October 2023, a thematic newsletter on animal welfare was released. Available in English - French - German

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### Research needs from practice

Research needs from the Focus Group on Sustainable Beef Production Systems. Find the [full report](#) on the EU CAP Network website.

- On-farm animal welfare assessment in grass-based systems: there is a research need for an alternative animal welfare evaluation system for non-intensive systems.

- Robustness and animal efficiency: there is a knowledge gap on robustness and efficiency in different production systems, breeds and environments.
- Impact of grass-based beef production systems on climate, biodiversity and on animal welfare

## EU CAP Network events focusing on innovation, knowledge exchange and EIP-AGRI July 2024 - June 2025

Find out more details on these events on the [webpage](#).

- **Focus Group:** Production of protein crops under climate change, 20-21 November 2024
- **Focus Group:** Alternative solutions for sustainable livestock product differentiation, 20-21 November 2024
- **Focus Group:** Local perennial plant genetic resources in view of climate change and biodiversity loss, 27-28 November 2024
- **Workshop:** National networking for innovation and knowledge exchange, January 2025
- **Workshop:** Circular bioeconomy - valorisation of forestry by-products and residues, January-March 2025
- **Workshop:** Innovation in logistics to improve the position of farmers in a supply chain, May 2025
- **Seminar:** Robotics and artificial intelligence (AI) in farming and forestry, February 2025
- **Seminar:** Demonstration farms, June 2025
- **Brokerage event:** Horizon Europe project calls, March-April 2025

## The Common Agricultural Policy 2023-2027

Find [information on the common agricultural policy 2023-2027 on the European Commission's website](#).

### Innovation, knowledge exchange and EIP-AGRI in the EU CAP Network

The new European CAP Network 'Support Facility for Innovation & Knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI' acts as a mediator, enhancing communication and cooperation between everyone with a keen interest in innovation and sharing knowledge for sustainable agriculture, forestry and rural areas.

The European Innovation Partnership 'Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability' (EIP-AGRI) was launched in 2013 by the European Commission in a bid to promote rapid modernisation of the sectors by efforts to step up innovation. The EIP-AGRI aims

to foster innovation in the agricultural and forestry sectors and in rural areas by bringing research and practice closer together - in innovation projects as well as via the European CAP Network and the national CAP Networks. Also, grassroots ideas from farmers are developed into concrete innovative solutions through 'Operational Group' innovation projects. The EIP-AGRI aims to streamline, simplify and better coordinate existing instruments and initiatives, and complement them with actions where necessary.

[Common agricultural policy 2023-27.](#)

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### EIP-AGRI Operational Groups

EIP-AGRI Operational Groups **are groups of people who work together in an innovation project**. They bring together partners with complementary knowledge. The composition of the group will vary according to the theme and specific objectives of each project. Farmers, advisors, scientists, businesses or other relevant partners work together to find practical solutions for specific problems or opportunities for European farmers and foresters. Farmers and foresters need to cooperate throughout the project to ensure that the innovative solutions are practical and likely to be quickly applied in the field. Read the [basic principles](#), [Innovation support services](#) (including advisers with a focus on innovation), and in particular innovation brokering, can therefore play a crucial role in getting worthwhile projects off the ground by facilitating contacts.

### Operational Groups funded under Rural Development Programmes 2014-2022

- Ninety-eight Rural Development Programmes 2014-2020 (RDPs) provide support to innovative EIP-AGRI Operational Group projects.
- More than 3200 Operational Group projects have been notified in the common EU data repository and are currently ongoing (or already finished).<sup>\*</sup> Member States will still start more Operational Group projects which may run until 2025 (under current transitional rules for EU Rural Development Programmes). Find information on all these projects in the [EIP-AGRI project database](#).

### Operational Groups funded under CAP Strategic Plans 2023 - 2027

Within the common agricultural policy 2023-27 (CAP), the EU Member States have designed national CAP Strategic Plans combining funding for income support, rural development, and market measures. All CAP Strategic Plans have been adopted and their implementation started on 1 January 2023.

Twenty-six CAP Strategic Plans include support for innovative EIP-AGRI Operational Groups. In total, 6600 EIP-AGRI Operational Group projects have been planned.

<sup>\*</sup> July 2023

