

Regional AKIS Stakeholders workshop: Southern Europe Cyprus AKIS – Brief context

Agricultural context

The agricultural sector in Cyprus is characterised² by the second smallest average farm size (3.2 ha. vs. 15.2 ha. in EU-27), the second highest proportion of small scale family farms (75.7% less than 2 ha.) and a rather small percentage of employment in agriculture (2.1% vs. 4% in EU-27). The average age of farmers is higher than in most European countries (44.6% over 65 years old vs. 32.8% in EU-27); the number of young managers less than 40 years old by 100 elderly managers (65 years old and over) is the lowest in the EU-27 (7.3 vs. 32.5 in EU-27) while, at the same time, 72.5% of the farm managers have practical experience only (vs. 68.3% in EU-27).

Labour productivity in agriculture (EUR/AWU³) is below (82.6%) the EU-27 average. Animal production is more important than livestock production (61:39 in terms of gross output, 2018). Farms with livestock account for 29% of all farms.

Almost two thirds of the agricultural output value come from milk, pigs, poultry, fruits and fresh vegetables.

Main crops⁴ are fodder crops, cereals, olive plantations, vineyards, potatoes, citrus, nuts and fruit trees and vegetables. Out of the total agricultural land almost 19% is irrigated (2010). The breeding of pigs is important in Cyprus (almost 39% of all LSU⁵) followed by small ruminants (27%) and dairy cows (14%).



Main characteristics of the AKIS

In Cyprus, the AKIS comprises the Dept of Agriculture, Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources & Environment (mainly its Extension Section), and ARI (the Agricultural Research Institute), the newly established Cyprus University of Technology, private consultants and private (input) shops/companies, Farmers Unions, Development Agencies (LEADER LAGs), producers groups and individual farmers.

In terms of knowledge generation ARI, through its applied research, predominates given that the university has only recently started to play some role; neither institute has mechanisms to disseminate knowledge to farmers. An important fact (confirmed by both ARI and the University) is that (very few) farmers have recently started to ask for specialized information and fund small-scale projects (mainly product analyses).

New knowledge and technology is also imported or generated (experimental plots) by private input companies (input shops). In terms of knowledge dissemination the Extension service (comprising the Extension Section, the District Offices and local/beat extension workers) predominates. Private companies' agronomists as well as Producer Groups' (esp. of the ones applying quality systems) and Farmers Unions' agronomists also contribute to the transfer of knowledge and technology to farmers. Farmer-to-farmer dissemination plays an important role as well.

Despite the fact that there is not any specific policy framework or formal agreements between the AKIS actors, the Extension Service covers, as a coordination mechanism, more or less, actors' bonding needs. The service is, for example, in contact with Producer Groups and Farmers Unions as well as with individual farmers through District Offices and beats extension officers; therefore, a two-way communication mechanism between the Extension Section and farmers is long ago established and still working. Important in this respect is the adapted knowledge (esp. on new crops or varieties) produced by innovative farmers in collaboration with the District Offices, the Extension Section and, generally, the Dept. of Agriculture.

Furthermore, the Extension Section cooperates with ARI in putting together its annual extension programmes (which the Section monitors) as well as in defining research needs. ARI staff participate in the service's educational activities and tries (although without a relevant section/staff or funds) to grasp farmers' problems.

Missing links may be identified between private (input) companies and the extension service as well as between private advisors/consultants and the service (i.e. beyond legal matters). Nevertheless, informal links (occasionally) exist at district and local level. Given that:

a) the Extension Service has increasingly undertaken bureaucratic tasks thus retreating from its educational role;



b) the decreasing interaction of ARI with farmers; and

c) both ARI and the Cyprus University of Technology are largely dependent on participation in EU-funded projects which do not, more or less, correspond to the needs of the Cypriot agriculture, while, at the same time,

d) are both largely oriented towards publications in scientific journals,

the need for more intensive cooperation between all the actors concerned (with the lead of the Dept. of Agriculture/ Extension Section) underlined by all the actors in Cyprus.

Concerns are also expressed about the inadequate staffing of the Extension Section, and more generally of the Dept. of Agriculture resulted in the downgrading of extension/advisory work in Cyprus; privatisation does not seem to be a viable option for Cyprus due to the extremely small scale farming (and other structural characteristics of the sector) in the country. The updating of extensionists' knowledge (including extension methodology) has been put forward.

Advisory service provision

Cyprus has a substantial component of its AKIS within a single organisation (MANRE, the Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment). The Agriculture Division of MANRE undertakes activities in research through ARI (the Agricultural Research Institute) as well as in extension and farmers' education/training (Agricultural Extension Section of the Department of Agriculture). The Agricultural Extension Section comprises the headquarters (in Nicosia) and six District Agricultural Offices further divided into smaller target-areas called "agricultural beats". The Agricultural Extension Service aims at informing MANRE and ARI on farmers' problems, and to plan, promote and evaluate extension programs (information and training activities on innovations) as well as to carry out a wide variety of agricultural projects. Its activities are complemented by private (input) shops (run by agronomists) and private consultants as well as farmers' unions and producers groups. LAGs and other stakeholders play an important role in terms of rural development projects.

Cyprus has retained a strong, largely publicly funded advisory service, free of charge for farmers. There is recognition that given the very small farm size of holdings in the country the government should support farmers through a public advisory service

AKIS diagram



