

Regional AKIS Stakeholders workshop: Southern Europe

I ITALY I AKIS – Brief context

Agricultural context

Italian peninsula is split in two eco regions (temperate and Mediterranean) that give rise to 33 ecological subsections. The joint action of climate and morphological features (shaped by Alps and Apennines Mountain chains and the Mediterranean Sea) has produced a manifold agriculture that cannot be fitted in a single model, either from a business or technical perspective.

Side by side with the intensive, market-oriented agriculture of the main plains and valley bottoms there are countless little farms, devoted to small or quality productions, mostly distributed in mountain or internal areas whose function as providers of environmental services is far more important than their economic outputs. These two main types of agriculture deal with completely different sets of issues, since intensive agriculture struggle in a much more competitive market, strongly oriented to the long (often international) value chain, while facing sustainability issues, mostly tied to water consumption, pesticide usage and soil pollution. On the other hand, quality agriculture is essentially valorised in short, alternative value chains, where positive externalities are more promptly acknowledged than in traditional markets.

Table 2: Structural and economic indicators of Italian Agriculture

	Italy				EU 27
	North	Centre	South	Total	
UAA (ha)	4,441,170	2,088,310	6,068,670	12,598,150	156,662,970
<i>Whereof: organic</i>	<i>339,837</i>	<i>420,606</i>	<i>1,197,597</i>	<i>1,958,040</i>	<i>11,445,112</i>
Holdings	280,360	178,850	686,470	1,145,680	10,282,790
UAA/Holding	15.8	11.7	8.8	11.0	15.24
Livestock units (LSU) (thousand)	6,490	717	2,262	9,468	118,089
<i>Whereof: Bovine</i>	<i>2,896</i>	<i>363</i>	<i>1,295</i>	<i>4,554</i>	<i>57,457</i>
<i>Swine</i>	<i>1,840</i>	<i>89</i>	<i>108</i>	<i>2,036</i>	<i>31,917</i>
<i>Sheeps and Goats</i>	<i>64</i>	<i>128</i>	<i>609</i>	<i>801</i>	<i>7,471</i>
Workers in Agriculture, forestry and fishery (thousand)	288.1	125.6	430	843.7	7,903
<i>% on total workers</i>	<i>2.43</i>	<i>2.60</i>	<i>7.16</i>	<i>3.72</i>	<i>4.06</i>
Gross Value Added (million €)	16,110	5,686	12,931	34,727	220,725
<i>% on Total GVA</i>	<i>1.74</i>	<i>1.60</i>	<i>3.48</i>	<i>2.10</i>	<i>1.83</i>

Source: Eurostat National Accounts (2019), Farm structure survey (2016); Sistema di Informazione Nazionale sull'Agricoltura Biologica – SINAB (2019)

Generally, the agricultural sector of the Northern districts appears to be much more competitive and intensive, with greater holdings and higher values of GVA per workers (value



added per hectare is 3,627 €/ha). On the other hand, in southern Italy there is a clear prevalence of more sustainable agriculture, with a greater quota of organic farming and a prevalence of small farmers (value added per hectare is 2,756 €/ha). Also, the distribution of the main productions reveals a certain difference between Northern, Centre and Southern Italy, with a stronger contribution of permanent crops (grapes and wine above all) in the North, a prevalence of horticultural productions in central Italy, while in Southern Italy, where permanent crops are responsible of the 48% of vegetal productions output, fruits alone contribute for the 20% of the output generated by cropland. As for arable land, they have a certain economic importance in the North since their contribution is 29% of total agricultural production (20% in central Italy and 11% in southern Italy).

Woodland covers 31.5% of the Country, although huge differences exist among the 20 Italian regions. Despite such an importance in territorial terms, forestry has a marginal value in the Italian economy, due to a lack of a solid and nationwide timber industry (a real wood industry exists only along the Alpine arch). Only 5.9 out of 100 workers in agriculture is employed in forestry and logging. Italian forestry sector suffers from the extreme fragmentation of wooded land, traditionally managed as coppice and maintained as a supply of firewood or small working timber for the farm own use. However, in recent years, alternative and efficient ways of woodland valorisation emerged. Small wood-energy supply chains, for the heating of public buildings, for instance, are multiplying all along the Apennines, while the simultaneous conversion of old coppices to high forests, to enhance their recreational value for the benefit of local tourism has become a widespread practice as well. On the other hand, as the demand of non-wooded products (berries, mushrooms...) is growing, alternative forms of management are gaining room alongside traditional ones.

Main characteristics of the AKIS

The Italian AKIS is a complex multi-actor and multilevel system, characterized by a large number of entities and governance levels. This is mainly due to the division of roles between the State and the Regions and Autonomous Provinces (Trento and Bolzano), which have the jurisdiction over agriculture. This institutional arrangement has led to the raising of at least 21 regional AKISs, that show different degrees of cohesion and organization. The development of systemic thinking, common vision and system commitment by the actors animating them are closely linked to the cultural and relational specificities of the regional territories as well as the diversity of farming systems, policies delivery, socio-economic background, environmental and orographic features of the territories. For these reasons, a single country-perspective of the Italian AKIS cannot provide the real state of the art of the country, which rather requires a multi-perspective analysis, as it includes a supply chain perspective, a farming system perspective and a local one.

The Italian AKIS, as a whole, is strongly interconnected with the regional ones and permeated by a wide variety of actors, which represent an asset in terms of cross-fertilization and growth of knowledge and innovation systems at different levels.

Knowledge flows between these actors vary according to the dimensional scale under consideration (national, regional and local) and the reference regional AKIS.

In general, at local level, the recent cooperation measures for innovation introduced by the RDPs 2007-2013 (Meas. 124) and 2014-2020 (Meas.16), as well as local learning and innovation networks for sustainable agriculture (e.g. Food Communities, local organic networks, etc.), have contributed to the development and/or strengthening of relations between the different actors of rural development and, in particular, between farmers and advisors on the one hand and the



research world on the other. This is as indicated, as an example, by the maintenance of relationships beyond the innovation projects term and by the sustainability of innovation partnerships through the different programming periods (submission of consecutive proposals from measure 124 of RDPs 2007-2013 to measure 16 of the RDPs 2014-2020). In many cases, these partnerships and/or innovation networks include a variety of actors (farmers, advisors, researchers, SMEs, local administrations, consumers), so as to be considered as micro-AKIS where an interactive innovation transfer model is implemented.

Beyond the local dimension knowledge flows become more formal and are characterized by a low degree of system-perspective. An important element that is certainly characterizing the strengthening of a country-perspective AKIS is the progressive consolidation of trans-territorial relationships, triggered by actors that are sufficiently well organised (research, advisory, input providers) to permeate the different regions, that foster the cross-contamination of the different AKIS in terms of knowledge, leading to the definition of new knowledge co-creation processes.

In tune with the multi-level governance of the Italian AKIS, the coordination structures are articulated by area of knowledge (R&I, education and advisory/extension services) and at national and regional levels. In this context, coordination arrangements (bodies and procedures) have been set up primarily to address inter-institutional collaboration and dialogue aimed at ensuring a certain consistency of policy, programmes and projects design and implementation, as well as and avoiding, as far as possible, overlaps and double funding. At interregional and transregional level, the Interregional Network for Agricultural, Forestry, Aquaculture and Fisheries Research and the National Rural Development Network, play a role in defining common vision and supporting the implementation of R&I policies and programmes, mediating different positions and articulating demand.

The greatest constraint of Italian AKISs is undoubtedly the shortage of financial resources to be allocated to research and advisory that, since several years, are exclusively restricted to European sources. Considering the dynamism and a growing awareness that arises from the territories in terms of new cooperation capacities, which have proven to be able to overcome individualism and pool knowledge sources, the absolute dependence on European funds is a missed opportunity. In fact, national or regional resources would allow to give more continuity and consistency to cooperative partnerships, allowing relationships to grow and thus feeding the AKIS.

Advisory service provision

The state of the art of agricultural and forestry advisory service(s) confirms the trends that have distinguished Italy for at least twenty years: the presence of a plurality of advisory service providers and the exclusive dependence of public services provision on CAP funding.

The introduction of the EIP-Agri has led to new demands for advisory services and, therefore, new subjects able to provide them have emerged. Therefore, there has been a widening of advisory providers, that now include also actors from downstream of the production chain (agri-food sector) or from other sectors to provide intermediation services, project design and management, administrative services, etc. The emergence of different service providers, as well as new models of services provision, has been facilitated by a gap in traditional advisory services that followed a progressive cut in public funds and the failure of the Farm Advisory System (Cristiano and Proietti, 2015).



Due to this breakpoint, even some traditional providers have been forced to review their role and competencies (reorganize) to meet new needs. This is the case, for example, of the Regional Agencies, which have been revitalized through the assignment of new functions within innovation processes. In several regions, Regional Agencies play a key role as brokers, carrying out a needs assessment, aggregating relevant partners around a project idea, supporting the co-ordination of the wider dissemination of project results (through farm visits, events, etc.).

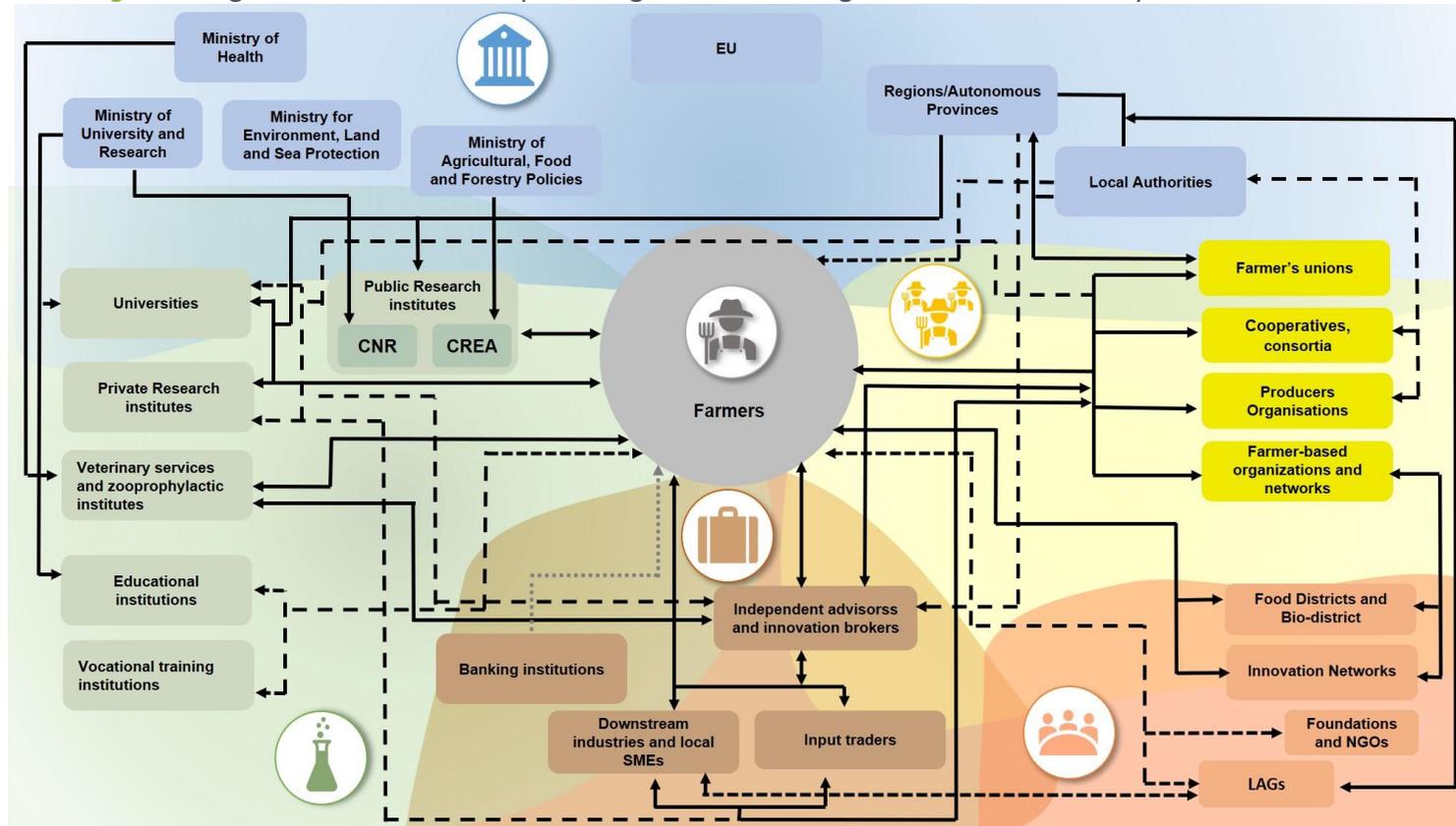
Farmers' Unions have also gone through a transformation phase, enhancing their role in supporting new innovation pathways, thanks to an internal reorganisation, the acquisition of new skills, and the outsourcing of some services.

Finally, there are freelance advisors who, being aware of the need to widen their professional skills in order to provide adequate solutions to a wider range of needs from the different territories, have started organizing themselves through innovative advisory networks and other associative arrangements. In general, they show a higher propensity to update their own networking, communication, and facilitation skills, as well as to identify the enabling conditions for acting as go-between farmers' needs and the different knowledge sources.

This phase of general re-organisation of service providers turns the spotlight on professional skills development and update. The current system of life-long learning credits provides a dynamic skill updating mechanism that is able to cope with rapid changes affecting the agricultural sector. This system has fostered the rise of a certain variety of actors that are specialised in providing technical updating services, while also bringing advisors closer to emerging research issues. On the other hand, there is also a need to systematise existing expertise (e.g. to train new generations) through a greater use of innovative approaches such as coaching.



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- **AKIS diagram:** Diagram of the relationships among actors of the Agricultural sector in Italy

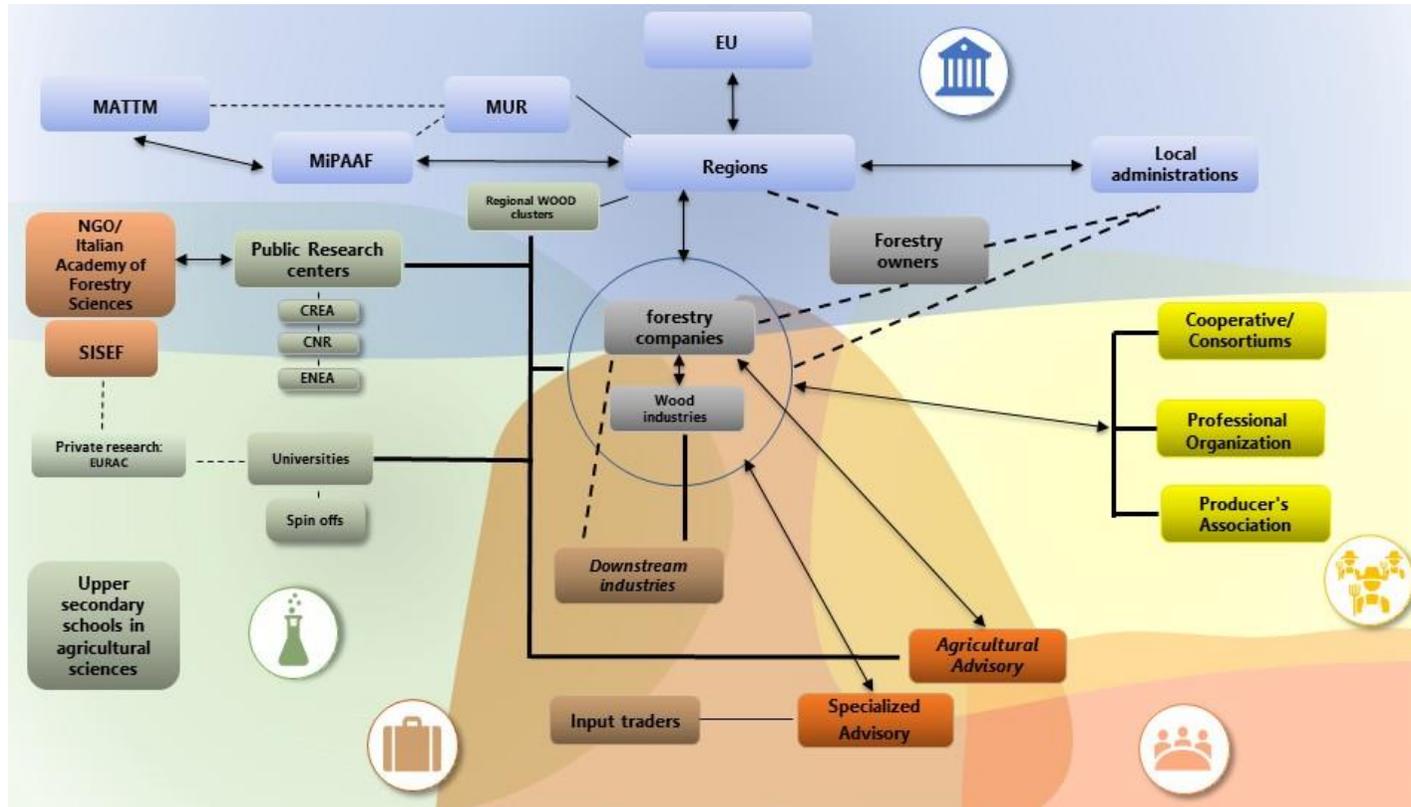


• Source: Our elaborations based on interviews

• **Legend**

- Public authorities
- Research and education organisations
- Private sector (for profit)
- Third sector farmer/farmer-based organisations
- Third sector NGO (non-profit)
- Strong Linkage
- Weak Linkage

- *Diagram* of the relationships among actors of the forestry sector in Italy



Source: Our elaborations based on interviews

Legend

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| ■ Public authorities | ■ Private sector (for profit) | ■ Third sector NGO (non-profit) |
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