



UNIVERSITÄT
HOHENHEIM

Fellowship summary report

Study title: Challenges and opportunities for privatised agricultural advice in the AKIS – a case study from the UK

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OECD CRP Fellowship summary report

Subject title: Sustainable Agricultural and Food Systems
Theme 3: Transformation, Technologies and Innovation

Host institution: Countryside and Community Research Institute (CCRI), UK

Host's name: Prof. Dr. Julie Ingram

Dates of fellowship: Jan 15, 2024 to March 28, 2024 (with 2 weeks break)

Hereby, I give my consent to this report or excerpts of it being posted on the CRP's website.

1 The objectives of the research project, its general importance

The objectives of the study were

- (i) to identify, by means of an overview diagnosis of the English AKIS (Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System), key actors that are crucial for farmers' access to relevant and up-to-date knowledge and sustainability innovations;
- (ii) to focus in particular on private sector advisory professionals and services in order to close structural knowledge gaps;
- (iii) to develop targeted recommendations for policy interventions towards effective AKIS coordination and governance with regard to the heterogeneous advisory subsystem;
- (iv) and finally, to test its methodological transferability by using the AKIS visualisation tool.

The importance of the topic results from the renewed attention and recognition that is given to agricultural education, training and advisory services as important drivers for change and innovation in agriculture towards an increase in sustainability and resilience of the sector. Advisory services in Europe are characterised by a growing pluralism of actors and their activities, with a particular increase in various private entrepreneurial actors. This trend towards privatised service provision comes with questions on their effectiveness and performance with respect to satisfying farmers' knowledge and innovation needs on the one side, and on the degree of responsiveness to societal and political objectives on the other. Additionally, advisors in general face a huge pressure to stay updated themselves with respect to innovative practices and the use of new, digital technologies. Due to characteristic sectoral features and recent political changes, the country England in the UK is particularly well suited to study how private entrepreneurial advisors cope with current challenges and manage to successfully perform within the larger AKIS. Results will deepen analytical concepts for AKIS studies in general, inform about measures to support knowledge and innovation spread and potentially increase advisors' intervention options within the AKIS, not only in England but also in other European countries with similar AKIS features.

2 Where the objectives of the fellowship achieved?

Up to today (May 28, 2024), the objectives of the fellowship are partly achieved. In the frame of my stay at CCRI, I had comprehensive backing and all technical facilities to carry out a thorough literature assessments and internet searches; also, I received continuous support from my host and other colleagues at CCRI in identifying relevant studies, sources and potential interview partners as well as background knowledge, so that the data collection could be prepared and implemented according to the procedure described in the application. However, it occurred a certain time delay due to late responses of some of the interview partners. Due to delayed interviews, the processing of the data was not completed during the stay at CCRI and is currently still underway, slightly hampered by the fact that I'm back to my usual working routines and commitments. With respect to the above-mentioned objectives, it can be stated that the material from the desk study and the interviews will allow to satisfactorily respond to objectives n° 1, 2 and 4, and partly to objective n° 3. Here, limitations exist because (a) it was not possible to reach and interact with policy makers and (b) there was very little resonance to this particular issue among the interviewees. Summarising, the objectives have not yet been achieved, because of a time delay in the data collection and subsequently in data processing and report writing, but it is very likely that the objectives will be achieved within the coming 6 – 8 weeks.

3 What were the major achievements of the fellowship?

- Detailed overview of key actors, their roles and activities within the AKIS in England, complemented with a visualised version, as well as an in-depth understanding of the different types of private for profit and not-for-profit advisory service providing organisations which goes far beyond what is currently available in the literature;
- A high sensitisation for and improved understanding of the diversity of farmer-led demonstration farm and innovation networks and the challenges with respect to their integration into the wider knowledge exchange within the AKIS;
- An in-depth understanding of the political strategy and policy instruments for the agricultural sector in England after the Brexit,
- Besides, inspiring and enriching insights from the multi-faceted, interdisciplinary host organisation CCRI.

4 Will there be any follow-up work?

So far, it is agreed that there will be a report on the AKIS study, co-authored with my host, Julie Ingram. This report will be shared with all interview partners, any other contacts made during the stay at CCRI, and it will be made openly accessible on my department's website. Also, it is planned to further work with the collected data and refine the report material to elaborate an article to an international peer reviewed journal. Finally, it is likely that I will continue the collaboration with the host and other members of the CCRI in the frame of joint applications for research projects, joint publications etc.

5 How might the results of your research project be important for helping develop regional, national or international agro-food, fisheries or forestry policies and, or practices, or beneficial for society?

Once, the analysis of the data is completed, I will be able to estimate the real importance of the study. So far, I can say, that the information collected was revealing for me in terms of organisational diversity, and actor constellations within the AKIS subsystems and many further observations that merit a deeper analysis and reflections. Without doubt is the empirical case different from all other current setting in the EU member states and thus, comes with a high potential to inform future AKIS diagnoses and analyses at regional, national and value chain or farming systems' levels. Also, inside England, such an analysis has not been done for many years, and there was a general interest in the report.

As the AKIS concept is of topical actuality in the EU member states, the benefits of the study can be expected for policy makers concerned with giving farmers access to topical knowledge and innovations. I'm sure that an analytical appraisal of the highly diversified AKIS in England is of interest for EU and national policy makers in the field of agricultural research and innovation programmes. In this respect, I'm expecting to present study results to the members of the SCAR AKIS group, which is a consulting body to the EU commission, in particular DG Agri and DG research and innovation, and within the various AKIS related EU projects, I'm currently involved in (e.g. i2connect, modernAKIS, EU4advice).

6 How was this research relevant to the objectives of the CRP and the CRP research theme?

The study is relevant to CRP objectives as it is applied research on the current and ongoing challenge of providing as many farmers as possible access to topical knowledge and innovation aiming at the increase of

agricultural sustainability and resilience. The study contributes to the theme ‘transformational technologies and innovations’ because the AKIS perspective is instrumental to effectively inform and connect various actors in the agri-food system with similar interests regarding knowledge acquisition and sharing and the diffusion of innovations. Thus, it contributes to provide a favourable ‘ecosystem’ for agricultural innovations to be developed and spread.

7 Satisfaction

The fellowship entirely met my expectations and allowed me to concentrate fully on the field study - a situation I had not experienced for more than 10 years. The cooperation with the members at CCRI was enriching and pleasant, and it will without doubts increase my professional network as well as I will be happy to receive CCRI members and other experts I met in my department for future collaboration. I did not encounter any practical problems related to the CRP and have no improvements to suggest. I would also like to thank for the guidance and support, I received through the talk with the scientific advisory board member and the smooth handling of the fellowship by the OECD programme assistants.

8 Advertising the CRP

Actually, I got the information via e-mail from our faculty administration, but I was already aware of some colleagues who had participated as CRP fellows. So, with the e-mailed programme, I somehow consolidated the information.

In order to increase the visibility in Germany, you could contact the German association of university professors and lecturers (DHV, <https://www.hochschulverband.de/en/>), which is the renowned interest body of academia in Germany. The association has a monthly journal where you probably could place an information, and/or maybe an advertisement on their website. Personally, I will definitely share the information within my network.