

Review of the implementation of EU-FAS policy in Member States of EU- Romania

This report was prepared by **Raluca Barbu** (Highclere Consulting).

I- Executive summary

In the case of Romania, the complexity of EU-FAS requirements is reduced to addressing the mandatory baseline level – condition for accessing the area-based payments. Taking a closer look, it turns out that the capacity of the advisory services addressing such domains is insufficient, the advisors' level of training and expertise is quite reduced, and there is a general lack of hard and soft capacity in delivering anything else but that.

The (re) construction of a functional and efficient agricultural consulting system represents an urgency, not only from the perspective of the development needs of the farmers, but also from the access of Romania itself to the future post-2020 agricultural funds.

Equally, assessment of the very specific needs of farmers regarding agricultural consultancy services - both in terms of content - information, training needs - and preferred sources - are needed, to which entities they appeal, in which they trust etc.

The proposals of EU regulation that will regulate the future National Strategic Plans (NSP) include in the list of ex-ante conditionalities of access of money by each state the existence of an efficient AKIS system. Therefore, advisory services must demonstrate that it meets the minimum performance requirements - which cannot be stated at this time. Thus, improving the performances (qualitative and numerical - number of farmers advised / trained) of agricultural consultancy in Romania is one of the key elements for the successful implementation of the future National Strategic Plan post-2020. Farmers need support, in addition to the classical fields, and knowledge in very new fields, essential to comply with the rules, but also to harness the opportunities of the next CAP on cross-compliance, animal welfare, renewable energy, Genetically Modified Organisms, agriculture precision, bioeconomics, SMEs in rural areas. However, it is necessary to invest in training consultants in the public consultancy system.

As evidenced by the research and conducted interviews, farmers are relatively confused as to the source they should turn to for various types of consultancy for their business, the range being heterogeneous in this regard - from agricultural chambers, to private and media consulting. These assessments of the needs of farmers, both from the point of view of the necessary know-how content and the preferred sources of agricultural consultancy, need to be updated and constructed according to them. In order to support the farmers, it is necessary to develop an advisory services system integrated in a regional ecosystem that will also include clusters, universities, information centres, research institutes, etc.

Successful implementation of EAFRD projects is linked to availability of necessary advisory services. Small farmers, the ones most in need of advice, do not have access to it because of limited financial resources and project sizes. Therefore, involving agricultural advisors in providing necessary services for EAFRD projects' preparation and implementation is critical. For this to succeed, the experts involved in delivering the required services, must be properly trained and financially motivated.

Moreover, the consultancy must be accessible to the grass, be in the physical proximity of the farmer (ideally peer-to-peer for the small farmers).

II- Extensive description of the implementation of the EU-FAS in Romania

A) [Introduction](#) – General overview about the EU-FAS implementation

In Romania there are 2686 communes and only 450 Local Agricultural Consulting Centres (which are usually represented by a single agronomist engineer from the town hall). The problem of human resources can no longer be ignored: currently an agricultural consultant in the public system serves 12 000-13 000 farmers registered on the Paying Agency website (the small farmers managing one ha not included and which represent the majority of farmers in RO). The experience of the European states shows that an optimal proportion would be of 1 consultant to 65-100 farmers.

Starting with 1998, the advisory services in Romania have been organised under a distinctive agency – National Agency of Agricultural Chamber (ANCA) - under the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MADR) coordination, **its network of County Centres for Agricultural Consulting (OJCA) and Local Centres for Agricultural Consulting (CLCA)**. It soon succeeded to penetrate the rural communities and to become a real backbone of the linkage between central and local level. The public advisers were highly qualified and were constantly trained and engaged in technical assistance projects or collaborations, especially supported through the World Bank's programme for agriculture. Beside information, training and dissemination, one of the advisers' task was **to assess and collect the needs for training and information from farmers' side** and to communicate them to the central level – Ministry of Agriculture, who was considering such feedback when tailoring the policies.

However, since then the system has been repeatedly modified – it was decentralized in 2001, centralised again in 2004 and then ANCA was **dismantled** in 2009, after Romania's accession to the EU. The county offices remained in place, but subordinated to the local public administration of the County Councils. The number of advisors has been reduced, especially at the commune level, the communication and coordination with the MADR has been fragmented. At the same time, through the first Romanian's NRDP (PNDR 2007-2014), has started the funding of the private entities offering advisory services, based on calls under vocational training and advisory services measures funded by EARDF. The public advisors joined the Paying Agency caravans informing and disseminating the informations on cross-compliance.

Starting with the end of 2016, the structure of county offices for public advisory services have been taken back again under the coordination of MADR, following the same approach since 2009, but with a heterogenic function – fulfilling other tasks beside advisory (including collecting data for the farm accountancy data -FADN). The public services (now simple offices within the county agricultural directorates) run in parallel with private providers, without a clear coordination between them.

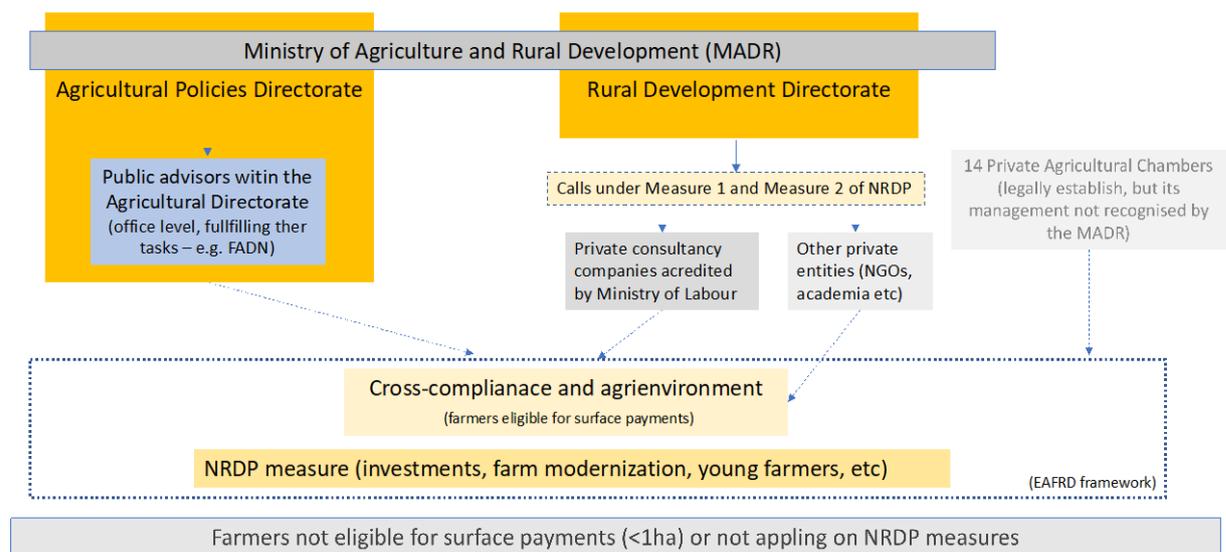
Currently, the public services are in charge with promotion and dissemination of the measures and programmes developed by Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MADR). With regard to EU-FAS, the main responsibility of the public advisory services system is to inform the farmers with regard to the mandatory baseline requirements (cross-compliance and agri-environment measure). Before the restructuring process in 2009, the public advisors were also engaged with the assessment, identification and support of the farmers' needs for farm development projects (modernization, farm management, non-agricultural activities etc).

The private advisory services systems consists in private agricultural chambers and private consultancy companies. These two categories of private advisors are mainly targeting the EU-FAS optional domains, especially assistance for farmers on NRDP projects, including modernization and young farmers. In addition to the public and private ones, there are also academic and research operators, and NGOs

targeting very specific domains of EU-FAS, namely biodiversity protection (butterflies, farmland birds, semi-natural grasslands). It worth mentioning also, that two NGOs (Nostra Silva and WWF) have covered the first afforestation and forest-environment commitments .

Nevertheless, there is no clear structure of the delimitations or overlappings between public and private coverage at county, regional or national level. Also, the support services such as financial or farm management, know-how, marketing, climate mitigation etc – meant to better “equip” the farmers (especially the small ones) for a more efficient farming are not addressed by any of the advisory services operators.

Configuration of the public and private advisory system in Romania



B) “Boundaries” of the implementation of the EU-FAS regulation

In 2017, the the advisory services were reorganized and integrated within the county agricultural departments (national level). Prior to the reorganization, the number of consultants was about 800, and subsequently their number decreased to 480 (on average 1700 holdings / consultant).

At this moment, the advisory services system in Romania is structured as following:

A. Public

- i) At national level, there are 41 directions for county agriculture (technical and methodological coordinated by MADR).
- ii) At local, communal level, there are 280 zonal technical assistance centers within the town halls (5-6 localities at a zonal consulting center).

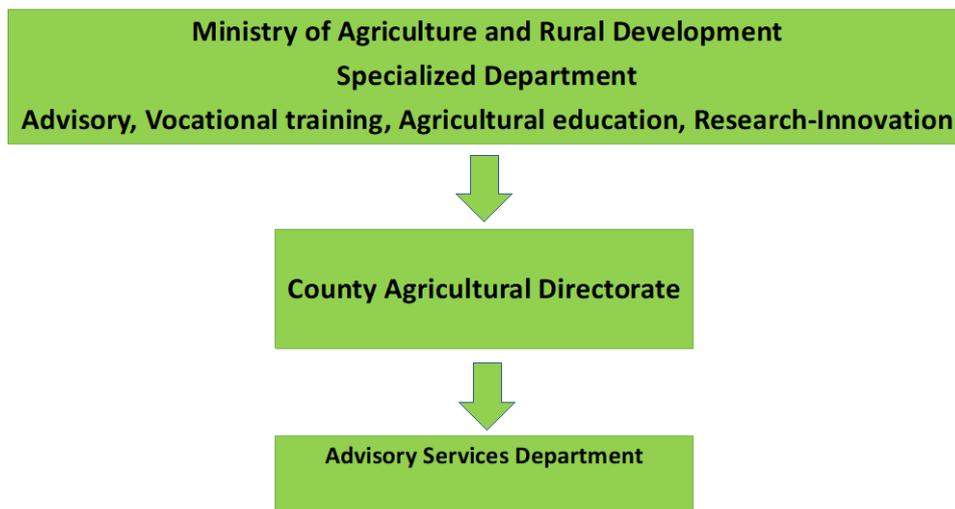


Fig. 1 According to MADR website

According to the documents published in the section "Advisory services" on the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MADR) website, the general objective of the public consultancy system is "to provide advisory services for farmers, especially for **subsistence farms, young farmers, small and medium-sized farms**".

The services offered by the public advisory services system¹ are divided into the following categories:

1. Vocational training;
2. Actions of promotion and specialized technical assistance for agricultural producers and agricultural specialists;
3. Realization of the necessary information flow for agricultural producers, technological transfer, dissemination of research results;
4. Actions for promotion - dissemination by organizing information campaigns, meetings at regional and county level in collaboration with institutions subordinated to MADR and local authorities;
5. Actions to identify the potential beneficiaries of the funds allocated through the NRDP, specialized technical assistance in the preparation of the necessary documentation;
6. Technical assistance and advising farmers for establishing associative forms.

B. Private

- i) Following the Government Ordonance no. 58/2013, in Romania were set up private Agricultural Chambers, of farmers, in 14 counties;
- ii) There are companies on the market that offer consulting in agricultural technical fields, attracting European funds, qualifications, etc.

C. In addition to public and private entities, there are also **agricultural research institute sand NGOs** with qualified personnel, specialized according to the research field predominant at the level of the institutes. In this case, the advisory activity is carried out through grants and research projects.

The advisors from the **public system** in Romania (Ministry of Agriculture structure) are manily involved with addressing the **mandatory requirements of FAS** for EU area based payments, especially the cross-compliance standards. Usually, that consists in a session preceeding the call opening for direct

¹ The county agricultural chambers are authorized as providers of vocational training in the agricultural field by the National Authority for Qualifications (source: MADR)

payments application by the Paying Agency. The session is basically delivering the content of the SMR and GAEC (informal session), the content of the AE packages (M10) developed (and amended if necessary) by the staff of Ministry of Agriculture, as well as the level of payments – depending on the regions where the AE packages are applying. Greening measures have been introduced to the farmers in 2017 when payments were introduced first. The lack of a functional FAS also appears to have imposed a huge additional burden upon the Paying Agency to provide more direct support to farmers than might normally be expected. The gap left by the missing advisory services close to the farmers has also resulted in big differences in adopting, understanding and implementing the additional commitments (basic level) by farmers. Also, information on **clima** was reduced to a AE package – climate resistant crops in a pilot.

The domain of **biodiversity on agricultural land** is addressed solely through the AE packages on butterflies and farmland birds protection. The content is delivered by the Agricultural Studies University in Cluj (butterflies) and BirdLife Romania, based on contracts with the MADR.

The entire territory of Romania is designated as NVZ. Despite this fact, there haven't been any sessions or services provided for dissemination of the Water Directive requirements by the public system advisors. Same being available for Pesticide Directive standards.

The **optional measures of FAS** such as farm modernation, risk management, diversification of farm activities have not been approached by the public advisory services in the current NRDP. The same is available for the topic of innovation and cooperation.

Nevertheless, the NRDP projects' preparation and implementation are complex and require various approaches (technical, economic and legal). For this reason, required services must include the full range of services. Quite often, however, beneficiary underestimate the importance of the implementation, consultants are only engaged in projects' preparation, leaving aside the most difficult part of the project. In this cases, implementation becomes the exclusive responsibility of clients and their lack of knowledge regarding the process and required steps stands as another reason for the poor performance of NRDP in Romania. Therefore, private consultants' involvement in implementation is absolutely necessary and it is a measure of their professionalism, but also of applicants' awareness. Many consultants only offer preparation services, and afterwards, although approved for financing, projects are blocked in implementation.

On the other hand, consultants are not interested in approaching small projects, which are not profitable for them. For this reason, applicants whose projects' values don't exceed a minimum limit have no access to consulting services, even if, at least in theory and as a general principle, financing small projects is preferred over funding large projects. Most affected and discouraged are small farmers. On top of that, applicants' unrealistic expectations lead to projects difficult to finance. They tend to overinvest and justify it by analysing the future activity based only on best case scenarios. Lack of knowledge on investment's economic feasibility is a problem of serious matter, which should be addressed by free training and advice, conducted by public advisors.

C) “Identity” of the suppliers selected for the implementation of the EU-FAS regulation

Beside the advisory services provided by the public system, the EU-FAS requirements are targeted through measure O2 of the Romanian NRDP. The text of NRDP is providing the framework for M02, but also includes the submeasure 2.1 **“Advising services for farmers, young farmers, micro-enterprises and small businesses”**. **The measure is not providing the definition of advisory services.**

The submeasure mentions that “agricultural advisory services should support small farmers and young farmers, people setting up non-agricultural activities in rural areas and producer groups in the elaboration and management of the implementation as well as in the elaboration of the business plan for development and market orientation, but also from the perspective of practicing sustainable and environmentally friendly agriculture and health, safety and environmental protection requirements and diversifying the activity.

Therefore, this measure will complement the need for free services offered by the public advisory service system, **especially for small and medium-sized farms, young farmers, producer groups and small entrepreneurs from rural areas, potential beneficiaries of the investment measures from the NRDP 2014- 2020, which do not have the resources necessary to purchase the private services offered by the private system at a cost.** The consulting services will be provided both for the elaboration of the business plans and for their implementation, in good conditions, throughout the implementation period.”

In other words, although the M02 is aiming to address a wider range of themes of EU-FAS, in the end is focused on a part of the EU-FAS mandatory domains, in particular farm modernation (market accession).

The **“suppliers”** as mentioned in the submeasure can be public and / or private entities, including associations which have as their object of activity information / demonstration and / or dissemination activities.

Also, the 152 page document introducing the piece of legislation regarding the public procurement for advisory services posted on the MADR’s website, doesn’t provide the definition of advisory services.

It has to be noted that, although the submeasure is addressed to the public entities as potential applicants, there were not such entities that applied on the measure.

Nevertheless, the submeasure has been launched in 2018, due to the delay in putting the public procurement framework in force. The last NRDP 2014-2020 evaluation report shows there were no projects awarded and no payments done for the projects submitted.

Scope of EU-FAS		Accredited supplier #1	Accredited supplier #2
<i>Mandatory</i>	(a) CROSS-COMPLIANCE <i>Standards for Good agricultural and Environmental Conditions (GAEC)</i>	<i>Public advisory services</i>	<i>Private providers (consultancy companies awarded through M1&M2 of NRDP)</i>
	(b) PRACTICES BENEFICIAL FOR THE CLIMATE AND THE ENVIRONMENT <i>(chap. 3 – Reg. No 1307/2013)</i> <i>Crop diversification, Permanent Grassland, Ecological areas</i>	<i>Public advisory services</i>	<i>- Private providers</i>
	(c) FARM MODERNISATION, <i>Competitiveness, Market, Entrepreneurship</i>	<i>Public advisory services</i>	<i>Private providers (consultancy companies awarded through M1&M2 of NRDP)</i>
	(d) WATER DIRECTIVE <i>Article 11(3) of directive 2000/60/EC</i>	-	-
	(e) PESTICIDE DIRECTIVE <i>Good practices for pesticide use & Integrated pest management. Article 11(3) of Directive 2000/60/EC and article 14 of directive 2009/128/EC</i>	-	-
<i>Optional</i>	(a) DIVERSIFICATION OF ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES <i>and conversion of farms (to organic farming??)</i>		<i>Private providers</i>
	(b) RISK MANAGEMENT <i>Vis-à-vis natural disasters; catastrophic events, animal & plant diseases</i>	-	-
	(c) AGRI-ENVIRONMENTAL SCHEMES & ORGANIC FARMING <i>Articles 28(3) and 29(2) of Regulation No 1305/2013</i>	<i>Public advisory services</i>	<i>- Private providers - NGOs (technical assistance measure)</i>

			- Academic
	(d) INFORMATION related to CLIMATE CHANGE, BIODIVERSITY, WATER	-	-

The previous NRDP (2007-2013) was clearly stating the existence and function of the Agricultural Chambers as a functional public advisory services system. The connection between EU-FAS and research was also mentioned as being an important element in delivering NRDP objectives, alongside with the need for on-going training of the advisors from the public system.

Nevertheless, the practice shows that there is a variety of different actors are therefore involved in the delivery of farm advice, including staff of the county-level Directorates (*Directia pentru Agricultura Judetean*) of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development; some private and public Chambers of Agriculture; large and small-scale private consultancy companies; staff of agricultural universities (either individually or through consultancy companies established by the University); individual advisers employed by large-scale farming companies, and; several NGOs working closely with small farmers.

D) “Control” of the quality of the services implemented under the EU-FAS regulation

i) **Selection procedures and requirements for the suppliers:**

- The applicant falls under the category of eligible beneficiaries;
- The applicant is a legal person constituted in accordance with the legislation in force in Romania;
- The applicant has provided in the activity object activities specific to the domain;
- The applicant has his own or co-opted personnel qualified in the fields corresponding to the topics provided;
- The applicant has access to the logistics corresponding to the specific activity;
- The applicant has the technical and financial capacity necessary to carry out the specific activities of
 - information;
 - The applicant is not in financial difficulty;

Participants in the information and demonstration activities are persons active in the agricultural, agri-food and environmental protection sectors.

Also, for selection criterias provides that:

- The principle of the thematic and of the target group, which involves adapting and detailing the general theme established to the needs of the target group in a certain territory, according to the area of public procurement (national, regional, county) area;
- The principle of efficient use of funds;
- The principle of efficient and accelerated implementation of the counseling services contract;
- The principle of supply quality.

The principles of selection will be detailed in the public procurement documentation aiming to ensure the equal treatment of applicants, better use of financial resources and their directing in line with the Union's rural development priorities.

E) “Attributes” of the services implemented under the EU-FAS regulation

Due to the delay in launching the measure, implementation of M02 is still at the very incipient level at the moment in the 8 projects. Therefore it's difficult to assess its outputs on EU-FAS. Nevertheless, based on the interviews conducted with the environmental NGOs and University in Cluj, carrying out the biodiversity content, they noticed a decrease of the farmers number applying on AE measure. According to them, the lack of assistance in understanding the articulation of the baseline level of greening and AE conditions triggered a certain insecurity from the farmers side to access the funds.

Also, EU-FAS requirements such as biodiversity or water protection, or climate are requiring much more than just a simple session of informing farmers per year. Advisory services are missing in supporting activities such as dissemination, demonstrations, field visits, cooperation, networking etc which would increase farmers' better understanding of the requirements.

F) “Financing” of the services implemented under the EU-FAS regulation

The initial budget allocated for M02 is 11,11 million EUR. According to the last NRDP evaluation report, there were 8 projects selected, but no payments done for these projects so far. The cost per farmer should not exceed 1500 eur/pers. The funds are 100% public.

However, according to the report² on NRDP under-accessed measure, considering the small number of contracts concluded, on 23 July 2018, with the amendment to the programme, measures were taken to reallocate the amount of EUR 51,120,737 of the total of EUR 60,386,100, representing the Union's contribution planned for period 2014-2020 allocated to Measure 2, for budgeting the introduction of M14 (Financing new commitments-DI3A). Thus, the budget available from the European Union planned for the period 2014-2020 for the implementation of Measure 2 is 9,265,363 euro. The justification of the NRDP MA on diminishing the budget allocated to the M02 has as its main motivation the late launch of this measure due to the transposition of a new public procurement legislation and the lack of interest of economic operators in accessing this measure.

Interviews conducted among the two providers confirmed that this sub-measure meets to a large extent the needs of potential beneficiaries/final target group, whether it is about farmers who are beneficiaries of sub-measures 6.1 Business start-up aid for young farmers and 6.3 Business start-up aid for development of small farms, or about farmers who have agri-environment commitments (Measure 10). However, the late launch of the proceedings (the first procedure was launched on 09.10.2017), was indicated as the main cause generating the unattractiveness of this sub-measure.

The requirements for the technical capacity of tenderers were difficult to fulfil. For the procedure *Acquisition of advisory services granted to agricultural producers in order to establish and develop partnership forms in the agricultural sector*, tenderers (economic operator or members of the Association together) had to demonstrate that had been providing consultancy services in the last 3 years under one or more contracts, indicating values, data and public or private beneficiaries, services of a minimum aggregate value of between 500.000-100.000 EUR. Providers have encountered a lot of difficulties in fulfilling the requirements related to experts proposed in the technical tender. The information collected reveals that, in this context, the capacity of Romanian firms is reduced. They do not have sufficient staff to implement such projects. Consequently, there occurred the need of involving partners in projects. The difficulty of identifying the experts requested under the awarding

² Evaluation of under-accessed measures under the NRDP 2014-2020, Bucharest, 2019, <https://www.madr.ro/pndr-2014-2020/implementare-pndr-2014-2020/evaluare-pndr-2014-2020/rapoarte-de-evaluare.html>

documentation is also due to the areas of expertise required – livestock, agronomy, horticulture, economic engineering in agriculture). Another cause affecting the attractiveness of this measure refers to the relatively low budget that was available for project implementation. Discussing about the procedure for *the Acquisition of advisory services granted to farmers operating on farms*, with the NGOs who applied for the support, the amounts allocated for the implementation were quite small (aprox 200.00 EUR) in comparison with the amount of work requested under the awarding documentation. In addition to meetings with farmers, campaigns to promote projects should be organised with a view to raising farmers' awareness of the appropriateness of the advisory programme, as well as visits to the holdings of the farmers identified as eligible beneficiaries, which are to be carried out by the individuals responsible for the implementation of the advisory services. The target group was difficult to identify (each village/city was visited, the Association of Communes of Romania was involved). Given the late launch of the procedure, many of the farmers had already requested the support of other consultants, had them write their projects and support them with the financing application process under sub-measures 6.1 and 6.3. It was not the case with the procedure on *The acquisition of advisory services provided to agricultural producers in order to establish and develop partnership forms in the agricultural sector*.

The table below there are the projects submitted on various EU-FAS domains on M02.

It is also to be noted that also M1.2 **Support for demonstrations and farm visits** – with high potential to support advisory services and implementation of EU-FAS activities, had a similar path, being launched late. There are 53 project submitted and no payments done so far.

Beside NRDP, there are no other sources of funding for implementing EU-FAS activities

Crt. No.	Acquisition name	Launching date	Deadline for receiving tenders	Status
1.	Acquisition of advisory services granted to farmers with agri-environment commitments (procedure for 5-plots)	23.03.2018	30.04.2018	Cancelled (In SEAP (Electronic System for Public Procurement) on 07.08.2018 12:25)
2.	Acquisition of advisory services granted to farmers with agri-	22.11.2017	15.01.2018	Cancelled (In SEAP on

Table 1 - Extras from the evaluation study of under-accessed measures in NRDP 2014-2020

	granted to farmers with agri-environment commitments (procedure on 5-plots)			SEAP on 10.10.2017 16:00)
4.	Acquisition of advisory services granted to agricultural producers in order to establish and develop partnership forms in the agricultural sector (procedure on 7-plots)	15.02.2018	29.03.2018	Assigned (on 03.10.2018 01:30)
5.	Acquisition of advisory services granted to agricultural producers in order to establish and develop partnership forms in the agricultural sector (7-plots procedure)	18.11.2017	15.01.2018	Cancelled (In SEAP on 07.02.2018 16:51)
6.	Acquisition of advisory services granted to agricultural producers in order to establish develop partnership forms in the agricultural sector (7-plots procedure)	30.08.2017	09.10.2017	Cancelled (In SEAP on 09.10.2017 16:00)
7.	Acquisition of advisory services granted to farmers working on	28.09.2017	09.11.2017	Assigned two plots (on

III- Effectiveness of EU-FAS

1. Facts and figures about EU-FAS implementation

A survey conducted in March 2013 by the Ministry of Agriculture among 146 small farmers in 11 counties showed that their options are quite divided between the "official" and accredited sources - Agricultural Chambers, the agronomist from the town hall and diffused sources, which provide consulting of questionable quality - newspapers, media etc. When asked "If you need technical consulting in agriculture, to whom do you call?", 28% of respondents said the Agricultural Chambers, 18% indicated newspapers, television and Internet, 17% a private consultant/consulting companies, 16% they said they would ask the specialist agronomist from the town hall, 10% a supplier of raw materials, another 10% would ask a neighbor or a more experienced friend, and 1% would call an agricultural university / college / research center³.

According to a study conducted by IRES in 2010⁴, there are 3 major areas of agricultural consulting and extension that Romania needs:

- i) supporting farmers to access the funds of the European Rural Development Program by **developing the application, ensuring bureaucratic procedures**, etc.
- ii) consultancy in plant and animal production;
- iii) **consulting for legal, cadastre, feasibility studies, marketing, management, training**, etc (support services).

Although having all of these information in-house, the indication of a very low political and institutional commitment of supporting the advisory services in Romania was clearly stated since NRDP 2014-2020 development, reflected in a small budget allocation and estimated number of farmers to benefit of the support, although the programming period was introducing new challenges for the farmers (esp. greening measures).

The **number of farmers estimated in the Romanian NRDP to be advised through M02 was 66 524 (less than 2% of farmers), while through M01 153 318 farmers were estimated to be trained and benefit of farm exchanges, demonstrations**⁵.

The funds allocated for **M01 and M02 altogether represents 78,711 million EUR - less than 1% of the Pillar II envelop** (99,58 billion EUR).

The preliminary results of the M02 are not available yet (due to the delay in launching and managing the public procurement procedure).

There is no data base publically available, centralizing the farmers benefiting of trainings on the mandatory requirements (cross-compliance) or on agri-environment trained by private consultancy companies or NGOs. The paying agency was able to provide us with the lists of farmers benefiting of agri-environment payments in the last 10 years, assuming that that number of farmers benefited by training as well. Therefore, in 2017, **68 984 farmers who benefited of agri-environment payments, with 107 328 (60%) less than in 2008**. Addressing this aspect during the interviews with environmental

³ Sorin Ștefanescu et. al., op. cit., p. 241.

⁴ Sorin Ștefanescu et. al., op. cit., p. 240.

⁵ Romanian NRDP 2014-2020, pg 549, https://www.madr.ro/docs/dezvoltare-rurala/programare-2014-2020/PNDR_2014_-_2020_01.07.2014.pdf

NGOs, farmers, academic field – which are running very targeted type of advice - a very important aspect that influenced farmers uptake for agri-environmental measures was lack of understanding of the articulation of baseline requirements, greening measure and agri-environment standards, generated by the missing advisory services close to farmers in explaining the complexity of the mandatory level of requirements. The big farmers have the economic power to address that with increasingly more sophisticated technology (precision agriculture) or to hire experts in the field, while the small farmers cannot afford it.

As mentioned above, at present, there are not enough consultants at the level of the agricultural directorates (one consultant has to provide consultancy for about 12 000 farmers), and the farmers have to travel large distances to benefit from the agricultural advisory service, which is why who often end up giving up this service.

Beside the mandatory level of EU-FAS, when it comes about addressing the **optional level of EU-FAS**, small farms are in biggest need of know-how, inputs and credits, in order to be sustainable. Large farms, also in need of know-how, have, nevertheless, larger capital resources, being able to implement new approaches and to produce more and cheaper.

There is a body of work regarding identification of small farmers' needs and of their requirements for advisory activities and consultancy services stands in the following facts⁶:

- Low level of small farmers' professional education; in contrast with the communist times, they are now required to make decisions, even if they don't have any agronomic education. Because most of these people don't possess the necessary technological knowledge to ensure efficient land use, consulting activities should represent a support by providing the needed know-how and information.
- For ex-communist countries, deficiency or lack of necessary knowledge about market economy is a specific phenomenon. In order to achieve a market oriented production, with respect to quantity, quality and cost, educating farmers in this regard is essential.
- Farmers need to be informed and to understand the system of regulations, subsidies, EU financing opportunities, credits etc.
- Transferring scientific results from research organizations to farms is crucial for establishing a modern and efficient agriculture.

Beside technical and business know-how for efficient farming, European funding provides great opportunities for farm modernisation, but rural investments' specific needs and complicated NRDP's procedures make consultancy services indispensable to anyone planning to apply and implement such projects. As a result, the consultancy market's demand has grown steadily over the past 10 years.

Trying to provide the necessary consulting services to small farmers, through a public advisory services system, failed expectations. The good results that the organization had in its training and extension services programmes could not be replicated in the case of preparation and implementation of SAPARD/EAFRD projects. The main reasons for failure stand in:

- Poor training of public advisors;
- Bureaucratic difficulties encountered by applicants – project's preparation is not enough; often, the consultant must be directly involved in the project, providing assistance for obtaining approvals, submitting the funding application, site visits etc., services not provided by public advisors;

⁶ Alexandru Sin and Czesław Nowak / Procedia Economics and Finance 22 (2015) 742 – 746, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S221256711500297X>

- Lack of public advisors' motivation, as everyone is remunerated with a fixed salary.

Moreover, frequent reorganizations of agricultural extension services have weakened even more their ability to provide consulting services for development projects.

2. In-depth analysis of one domain: Water management in agriculture

Among the most relevant challenges regarding the water management in agriculture in Romania are :

- Risk of natural disasters, adverse events and catastrophic events;
- Poor management of waste (including manure and slurry) from agricultural activities, especially on small farms;
- The availability level and technical capacity of the advisory and training services are inadequate to support the potential number of applicants for agri-environment and climate measures;
- Poor linkage between agricultural research and practical farming (with specific reference to challenges related to mitigation and adaptation to climate change);
- Insufficient experience amongst farmers of the complex implementation of the agri-environment and climate measures;
- Large areas of agricultural land are affected by soil degradation phenomena (erosion, landslides, desertification, etc.);
- Irrigation systems for medium and large commercial farms (since small farm do not have the financial and management capacity to use the irrigation systems) are mostly degraded and inefficient;
- Available water resources are limited and unequally distributed for dealing with the increased risk of drought.

As explained under section 2.0, the farm advisory system in Romania has suffered significant restructuring and re-organisation during the last 20 years and is currently very weak and fragmented when compared to the systems found in other Member States. In particular, it is widely acknowledged there is no fully operating or functional FAS – a situation now further accentuated by the late launching of M02 in the current National Rural Development Programme for Romania 2014-2020.

The availability level and technical capacity of the advisory and training services are inadequate to support the water protection theme. Although responsibility for supporting cross compliance was delegated to the Chambers of Agriculture, there was no corresponding allocation of resources and little related activity. Many interviewees referred to the fact that farmers **are confused about where exactly to ask for information and knowledge** and pointed out that there is a tendency to use non-impartial sources of advice such as agro-chemical suppliers and that there currently appears to be **no effective Farm Advisory System (FAS) in place**, especially when it comes about water management.

It is reported that the prevailing information gap has been **filled to some extent** by the Paying Agency (APIA). For example, comprehensive information materials on cross-compliance (or 'eco-conditionality' in Romanian) have been prepared and disseminated by APIA every year from 2015-2019, including relevant modifications following changes in the legal framework. Local APIA offices have organised **campaigns at village level** promoting the available payment schemes with particular attention paid to explaining the on-line application process and the various documents requested from applicants.

However, the situation remains far from perfect with much misunderstanding and tension around both cross-compliance and greening. The local APIA offices are overloaded with work and farmers are frustrated with the bureaucratic burden that has been imposed upon them.

IV- Discussion

In order to increase the accession level, it is necessary to consider the simplification of the criteria set out in the awarding documentation, especially regarding technical and financial capacity. Considering the launch of the procedure on plots, according to the development region, it is necessary to reduce the average of the global turnover in the last 3 financial years.

Additionally, in line with the decrease in the business environment, it is necessary to reduce the value of contracts resulting from the provision of advisory services in the last 3 years so that companies at local level can qualify, even if a partnership is needed in order to enhance the capacity for technical expertise.

Another aspect that needs to be improved when implementing this sub-measure refers to better informing potential tenderers on the implementation of this sub-measure, as well as on the start-up periods. Not all advisory services companies have a commercial department to deal exclusively with monitoring new tenders. Therefore, better communication and information of advisory companies is needed at both national and county level. Although a series of profile events (information campaigns, meetings with LAGs) were organised by the MADR, at regional level, the information campaigns on these sub-measures should be made at the level of each county.

An alternative suggested through the report on *Evaluation of under-accessed measures under the NRDP 2014-2020* to facilitating communication / information through the municipalities or another solution (expert) in the vicinity of the beneficiaries is the organization of a help desk at the main APIA centre, which develops and provides harmonized resolutions for identical cases. This help desk can be funded through the funds available under the NRDP for technical assistance and would partly compensate the lack of services provided under Measure 2 of the NRDP

It would be useful to promote information / training and advice on best agricultural practices for efficient use of water at the farm / area level - in accordance with the commitments and practices of M10 and 11.

Also, advising beneficiaries who have agri-environment commitments, organic farming (M10, M11). This will facilitate the provision of the prerequisites for the implementation of agricultural practices that contribute jointly to ensuring the sustainable management of natural resources (biodiversity, soil, water) as well as reducing GHG and ammonia emissions from agriculture. At the same time, promoting appropriate production methods will provide a better adaptation to the effects of climate change, increasingly manifested by extreme phenomena. By providing the necessary skills for implementation and commitments through access to advisory services, the beneficiaries of the measure are expected to provide the premises for achieving the objectives and to maximize the impact of the budget effort on agri- environment and climate commitments.

During the interviews and discussions had with advisors, representatives of think-tank NGOs, environmental NGOs and even the representative of ministry of agriculture the potetial solutions could be:

- i) Supporting the Local Action Groups in this area, through the LEADER axis, to integrate and develop agricultural consultancy infrastructure, within the future post-2020 CAP;
- ii) Development of agricultural high schools as local consulting hubs, as there are premises for these educational institutions to be re-valorized and developed, in the direction of transforming a resource center not only for future farmers, but also for adults in agriculture.

Regardless of the path to be followed in the future, the policy makers must not neglect the fact that ***“there is no progress in agriculture in the absence of a competitive advisory service”***⁷. This will have the mission to respond in the best way possible to farmers’ needs and to gain their confidence. As well as gaining the farmers’ community confidence, which is very important, the quality and constancy of services, as well as their support through agricultural policy measures and professional representation are also required. This alternative is most realistic, taking into consideration the European context of Romania’s agriculture.

⁷ Mărioara Rusu, *AKIS and advisory services in Romania Report for the AKIS inventory (WP3) of the PRO AKIS project*, 2014,
<http://proakis.webarchive.hutton.ac.uk/sites/www.proakis.eu/files/Country%20Report%20Romania%2020%2006%2014.pdf>

Factsheet about FAS assessment in Romania

Some Key facts about CAP implementation in France

- Number of farmers in the country.....	3563770 farmers
- Share of 2 nd pillar in CAP expenditure.....	24%
- Share of Knowledge measures (M01&M02) in the 2nd pillar of CAP.....	0,08%
- Planned expenditure per farmer (M01&M02).....	1500 euros / farmer

Some Key facts about the implementation of the EU-FAS in Romania

Pillar one (Regulation n°#)

Level of application

Regional National

Domain selected for the EU-FAS regulation

Mandatory

- Cross-compliance
- Paiement for environment & climate
- Modernisation
- Pesticides directive
- Water directive

Optional

- Diversification
- Risk management
- Organic
- Information on climate

Types of suppliers accredited

Indicate the type of suppliers accredited

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private independent consultant/firms <input type="checkbox"/> SME or start-ups <input type="checkbox"/> Public extension organisation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NGO <input type="checkbox"/> Charities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Chambers of agriculture <input type="checkbox"/> Farmers' rings or associations <input type="checkbox"/> Farmers' cooperatives <input type="checkbox"/> Private firms or retailers (inputs/outputs) <input type="checkbox"/> Bookkeepers <input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify)..... |
|--|--|

Method required for advisory services

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> One to one on the farm <input type="checkbox"/> One to one outside the farm | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Telephone helpdesk <input type="checkbox"/> General information via Internet |
|---|--|

<input type="checkbox"/> Small group advice on the farm	<input type="checkbox"/> Publication (paper copies)
<input type="checkbox"/> Small group outside the farm	X No requirement
Conditions required to be accredited for advisory organisation	
X Competences of advisors	<input type="checkbox"/> Networks
<input type="checkbox"/> Training of advisors	<input type="checkbox"/> Monitoring of advice activities
<input type="checkbox"/> Data base	<input type="checkbox"/> Knowledge platforms
Target public (categories of farmers or farm workers)	
Target group specified..... <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
<input type="checkbox"/> Farms with more than 15000 € direct support	<input type="checkbox"/> Zoning criteria.....
X Smaller farms.....	<input type="checkbox"/> Other criteria.....
<input type="checkbox"/> Other farms' criteria ...young farmers.....	
Pillar Two	
Use of measure M02..... <input type="checkbox"/> Yes X No	
Number of beneficiaries.....-	
Average expenditure per farmer.....-	
Domain selected	
X Cross-compliance	
X Paiement for environment & climate	
X Modernisation	
<input type="checkbox"/> Pesticides directive	
<input type="checkbox"/> Water directive	
<input type="checkbox"/> occupational Health	
<input type="checkbox"/> Farms setting up for the first time	

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