

The AKIS concept and its relevance in selected EU member states

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Abstract: Recently, Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKISs) have gained considerable attention in scientific and political forums in the European Union (EU). AKIS is considered a key concept in identifying, analysing and assessing the various actors in the agricultural sector as well as their communication and interaction for innovation processes. Using qualitative expert interviews and organizational mapping, the features of national AKISs were investigated in selected EU member states (Belgium, France, Ireland, Germany, Portugal and the UK). The authors present the different national AKISs and compare them qualitatively with regard to their institutional settings, their overall policy frameworks and their coordinating structures. Conclusions are drawn with regard to AKIS appraisal in general and the usefulness of the AKIS concept, particularly for the understanding and evaluation of policy-induced innovation in agriculture.

Keywords: agricultural knowledge and innovation system; CAP; AKIS diagram

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The European Union (EU) is experiencing a time of drastic economic risks and huge challenges for social cohesion between member states. As a political mid-term goal for the 10-year period from 2010 to 2020, the declared ‘Strategy 2020’ (COM, 2010) prioritizes economic growth based on knowledge and innovation, resource efficiency, and social and territorial cohesion in all member states. In this context, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) plays a crucial role. Especially through rural development policies, both the agricultural sector and rural territories are to be supported in their development efforts towards competitiveness, environmental and social balance,

resilience and innovativeness (EU, 2013). Here, several instruments aim to enhance the processes of knowledge exchange, information dissemination and information creation, namely knowledge transfer and information actions (*ibid*, Art 14), advisory services (*ibid*, Art 15) and cooperation in networks (*ibid*, Art 35). The underlying conceptual framework for this approach is that of the Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS), which is conceived as the purposeful network interaction for innovations of various actors either from within the agricultural sector or along an agricultural value chain (EU SCAR, 2012, 2013). In addition, the literature on