



The Farm Sustainability Data Network (FSDN)

Outcomes of the consultation process and discussions on possible concrete improvements of FADN in 2022

28-29 September 2021

The 2nd FSDN workshop was organised by the European Commission, DG AGRI, C3 unit of the Directorate C, on 28/29 September 2021. It was dedicated to the outcomes of the consultation processes and discussed concrete possible improvements to the current FADN system. The first workshop was organised in February, and was dedicated to the presentation of existing good practices that could be considered in the FSDN work.

The second workshop was organised with the participation of about 130 participants from liaison agencies and advisory services of the Member States, farming organisations, European Commission services, research institutes, evaluators, private organisations and companies.

THE OUTCOME OF THE CONSULTATION PROCESS:

DG AGRI presented the main outcomes of the Roadmap consultation and the EUSurvey that run during the summer, and updated on the work of the FADN working group dedicated to the reinforcement and the simplification of FADN.

In the consultations 363 contributions were provided, 330 in the frame of the EUSurvey and 33 on the roadmap.

Main outcomes:

- There is a strong support for modernizing the FADN system and for the conversion of FADN into FSDN.
- There are concrete proposals about how to monitor the environmental and social sustainability of farming; about what farmers could/would be willing to provide and about variables that users would need in order to assess the multidimensional sustainability of farming.
- The consultation provided an overview on the tools that could enhance farmers' willingness to take part in data provision, including the provision of tailored advice on farming practices.
- There are concrete proposals for reducing, limiting the administrative burden of the data collection, such as better data sharing tools.

- The consultation results support the idea of collecting variables once and using them several times; however, the challenges that these interconnections – interoperability – could represent (e.g. individual data protection, methodological issues, administrative setting ups, national specificities) are recognised.
- There is room for simplifying the current FADN system, some current variables could be dropped, merged or could be collected from other data sources or using different methodology.

STAKEHOLDERS' INTERVENTION:

Three contributors to the consultation process, Bayer, Agroecology Europe and the Nutrient Management and Nutrient Recovery Thematic Network, were invited to express their views on the Initiative. The interventions stressed the opportunities and challenges that the collection of additional environmental and social variables would represent, presented evidence-based methods and tools to assess and improve farming practices.

PANEL DISCUSSION:

In the panel discussion representatives from the Advisory services and Liaison Agencies from France, Germany, Latvia, Poland and Spain; from COPA-COGECA and DG ESTAT exchanged on “How to share data collection efforts and costs with the different actors benefitting from the FSDN data collection?”. The panel put in evidence the different practices, administrative setting ups in the Member States. The conversion effort will largely depend on the adaptation of current data collection tools and methods in the Members States; farmers, data collectors would need to be supported in this exercise.

WORKING GROUPS:

The 2nd day participants exchanged on 6 topics: on possible simplifications and reinforcements to FADN, on environmental and social variables, on incentives for farmers to participate in FSDN, on the use of collected data to improve farming practices and on the institutional set up and the role of advisory services.

- There was a discussion on the potential and methodological difficulties to use geospatial data.
- Participants exchanged on how to better interlink data sources, how to protect individual data and how to overcome the methodological, administrative issues. Member States where such interconnection are already in place shared their experiences. Research projects related experiences like ‘Demeter’ and ‘Atlas’ were presented. European Commission services presented the initiatives at EU level to improve interoperability and data sharing.
- There was a discussion about the representativeness of FADN system, pros and cons for having constant/rotating participating farms and about harmonised sampling list with other data collections.



- Concerning environmental sustainability, the importance of collecting information on chemical and non-chemical plant protection products was stressed. Participants discussed about the difficulty to collect some variables, for example on animal welfare and how other data sources could be used to reduce administrative burden for farmers and data collectors.
- In relation to social variables, while participants agreed on the importance of covering this third aspect of sustainability, they also reminded about the sensitivity of this data and possible reluctance of farmers to reply, also to qualitative questions.
- The frequency of the collection of new variables, the possible use of modules have been mentioned as possible tools to reduce the administrative burden.
- Concerns were expressed about farmers' willingness to take part in data provision. Good practices, tools were shared about how their participation is supported today in the Member States and what kind of new tools could be proposed for the future. Beside the financial support, feedback tools to farmers (e.g. via advice / benchmarking) and the importance of 'trust' in the collection system, efforts to limit the time needed for farmers to fill in the Farm return were among the solutions mentioned.
- In the discussion about the use of collected data for improving farming practices, the participants insisted on having quick and concrete feedbacks to farmers. Several Member States shared existing good practices.
- There was a strong support for better interconnecting FSDN with advisory services. In 21 Member States, such interconnections are already in place; there are many good existing private and public practices that should be maintained and developed. Individual data protection is key to ensure the setting of benchmarking tools. Data collectors and farmers would need to receive support (trainings, equipment) to make the most out of the available tools.

In its concluding intervention the European Commission, DG AGRI C Director, Mr Haniotis, recalled the enhanced green and social dimensions of the Common Agriculture Policy and the strong need of data to rely on an evidence-and performance-based policy. The current FADN sampling rules are considered to be appropriate to assess the three dimensional sustainability of farming. He underlined the European Commission's full commitment to ensure individual data protection, and that the FSDN system will be a helping tool for farmers and for policy makers. The aim is NOT for it to become a controlling tool. On the contrary, it can be a powerful tool in support to farmers towards more sustainable practices (e.g. via tailored advice). He acknowledged the effort that the conversion of FADN into FSDN will represent for all the actors, and committed to look at the specific challenges that some Member States could face in the process. The aim is to reinforce, simplify and modernise the current FADN system with a view to strengthen its contribution to policy making. For this, to set up FSDN in a way that it provides a set of common variables at European level to assess farming sustainability. The European Commission will give support to Member States to define and develop the appropriate tools and methods to collect and provide the data.

