

**Public Research in Agricultural Economics:
Organisation models, objects of investigation and targets**

Rome, October 14, 2014

9:00 Registration

9:30 Welcome Addresses and Introduction

9:50 Panel 1. Public research in agriculture: scope, organisation, institutions

Moderator: Francesco Mantino, Senior researcher at INEA

This panel will compare and investigate different organisational models of public and private research in agriculture, with a specific focus on the sources of funding, the research structure and the relationships with European and National Government Institutions and Universities.

10:50 Discussion: Janet Dwyer, Director of Countryside and Community Research Institute

11:00 Panel 2. Whom do we talk to? Dissemination of results and publishing in public research institutes

Moderator: Annalisa Zezza, Senior researcher at INEA

This panel will focus on the crucial issues of the beneficiaries of the research work in public and private Institutes: what, where and how to disseminate results, what publishing policies should be adopted in order to ensure and enhance quality research products, at the same time realizing results that are useful for technical support to National and European Government Institutions.

12:00 Discussion: Piero Conforti, Senior statistician at FAO

12:10 Panel 3. Agriculture and beyond: what is moving in Europe?

Moderator: Roberto Henke, Head of Macroeconomic and Short-Term Economic Analysis Unit at INEA

This panel will investigate the new topics arising in the broad fields of agriculture and agro-food systems. A particular attention will be devoted to the transformation of the role of agriculture in Member States and the new functions of agriculture in contemporary societies, as well as to the links and nodal points of the agro-food systems.

13:10 Discussion: José María García Álvarez-Coque, Professor at Universitat Politècnica de Valencia

13:30 Work lunch

15:00 Panel 4. Innovation, research and partnerships: what role for public Institutes?

Moderator: Guido Bonati, Senior researcher at INEA

This panel will investigate ways and opportunities for public research to contribute to the diffusion of innovations and to address the results of the policy analyses to economic and social actors. Public institutes can indeed play a crucial role as a “transmission belt” between research and analytical work and the production world, including the downstream components of processing, distribution and consumption. This specific role can become very relevant also in the international research and policy analysis arena, such as Horizon 2020 and the OECD working tables.

16:00 Discussion: Gianluca Brunori, Professor at University of Pisa

16:30 Highlights and Conclusions: Luca Bianchi, Head of Department at the Italian Ministry of Agriculture

17:00 End of works

Issues and scope of the event

This event is financed by INEA within the activities of the Observatory of Structural Policies. The Observatory, launched in 1996 with the aim of supporting the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry and the Italian Regions for the evaluation of structural intervention programs, promotes research activities on issues relevant to the design of rural and agricultural policies.

The Conference moves from the assumption that changes affecting rural society and economy during the last decades require a rethinking of the whole system of public research in support of the making of policies affecting rural areas.

Organisational models

The research system around agricultural economics is quite vast and features various organisational models. In most cases it lays on independent Institutes (Italy, Austria, Poland, Japan), in other cases it is part of a larger net of research institutes for agriculture (France), other times it is a component of the academic network (Netherlands) or it is a body of the Ministry of agriculture, in all its different definitions (USA, UK). This last feature is predominant in non EU countries (USA, Canada, Australia).

It is a field in which changes occur quite quickly and at a fast pace, due mainly to budget reasons, the need to rationalising resources, or to better focusing on the main research topic.

There are also many private or semi-private institutes and agencies that work in the field of agricultural economics and other fields that are contiguous to it (agricultural and rural policies, environment, food, etc.). They also have a crucial role in the sector analysis and in the institutional support, often interacting with the public institutes.

Objects of investigation

The issue of the best organisational model for the research system in agricultural economics is tightly connected to the main objects of investigation that seem to have changed quite dramatically in the last decades, for different reasons, among which (from micro to macro):

- A change in the units of production. Farms nowadays are very different from the past, including new functions and activities and pursuing new strategies and goals. The spectrum of farm typologies is an issue that needs further investigation, also in order to better define

and qualify the “model of European agriculture” that is at the base of all the new EU policies for agriculture and rural areas.

- A change in the relationships of the primary sector with the other actors of the agro-food filiere (processing, marketing, exports).
- A change of the position of agriculture in the socio-economic systems of EU Member States. Agriculture is increasingly seen not only as an economic sector but also as a main actor providing environmental services, social and touristic services, and also featuring a residential function. At the same time, rural areas are not anymore seen just as production sites but also as a place for consumption and recreational activities. For these reasons, new research in agricultural economics need to take all these considerations on board and focus on the interrelationships between the “core” of the agricultural business and the role of agriculture in the environment, landscape, natural resources management, labour, markets, consumption, leisure.
- A change in rural society and economy. In recent years neo-liberal principles have informed the retreat of state intervention in rural development, the privatization of public services and the application of commercial principles to utilities that remain under state control, leading to the closure of uneconomic services and facilities in rural communities. As a consequence a problem of persistent rural poverty has emerged that cannot be addressed only by raising farm incomes, securing the family farm as the primary social unit of rural life and maintaining agricultural employment.

Whom do they talk to? Targets of the public research

One of the key points in the activities of public research institutes (and more in general about research) is how to combine the quality of work done on the matter and the communication and dissemination of results to a wider audience. By definition research does not reach a wide public because the main utilizers of the immediate results are experts, institutions, stakeholders and so on. In agriculture, the audience is even more restricted due to the apparently small contribute of the primary sector to the overall economy. Since public research relies on public funds, it is increasingly “under the spot”, especially in a context of reduction of financial resources and increasing competition among different utilisations. As a consequence, trying to reach a wider audience with simple but effective messages, is currently a priority.

A proposal from INEA

INEA would like to promote a workshop with other Institutes in order to discuss the key issues described before. The initiative aims at discussing among Institutes of a similar organisation and nature the following themes:

- Evolution, changes and perspectives in the public research for agriculture, with specific regards to the forms of organisation and management within the public research structures. The main objective of the discussion about this theme should be the comparison among different forms of organisation, highlighting the strengths and the weaknesses of each model and the possible future perspectives of the public research for agriculture in Europe and in other regions of the world;
- Relationships with the public and private institutions governing of the sector (EU institutions, Ministries, local institutions, stakeholders, professional organisations) and the possible forms of support supplied to institutions and other actors;
- The main dynamics influencing agriculture and rural areas: new (renewed) roles and new challenges for the public research institutes in the economic, social and environmental analysis of agriculture. In this regards, new keywords emerge in agricultural economics and become the centre of the scientific and institutional analysis of agriculture: multifunctionality, sustainability, diversifications, small farms, green economy, blue economy, to mention a few. How the non-academic public (and private) research is rethinking of itself and its role?
- The restructuring of rural society and economy and the search at local level for a new rural policies. Rural poverty and social problems of rural areas cannot be addressed anymore with policies concerning agriculture or forestry, or the management of rural land more broadly. The mainstream politics of education, health, social welfare, provision of public services and social justice issues need to be regarded as elements of a new rural policy. How will these changes affect public research in support to policy making?

Outcomes and future steps

An event like this would be a unique occasion to:

- present and discuss the rationale of a public research system and its long-term perspectives;
- discuss and compare the relationships with the wider research system inside the single countries and also outside them (Academic research, International agencies, and so on);
- discuss the editorial activity, the types of publications and the main targets of the research activity;

- discuss the relevant issue of the targets of the research activity and the possible trade-off between a rigorous research activity and the need to talk to non-professional, citizens and tax-payers;
- create, develop and enhance the conditions for the circulation of ideas and researchers, sharing projects, exchanging young professionals and senior researchers and creating a useful network for European research projects and support to the EU and international institutions.

List of participants

LEI Wageningen UR (Netherlands)

- Krijn J. Poppe
- Laan Van Staalduinen

Irish Agriculture and Food Development Authority (Ireland)

- Gerry Boyle

Thünen-Institut of Market Analysis (Germany)

- Martin Banse

National Institute for Agricultural and Food Research and Technology (Spain)

- Andres Montero Aparicio

National Agricultural and Food Centre (Slovakia)

- Stefan Mihina
- Ivan Masar

Austrian Federal Institute of Agricultural Economics (Austria)

- Thomas Resl

Leibniz Centre for Agricultural Landscape Research

- Annette Piorr

- Janet Dwyer, Director of Countryside and Community Research Institute
- Piero Conforti, Senior statistician at FAO
- Gianluca Brunori, University of Pisa
- José María García Álvarez-Coque, Universitat Politècnica de Valencia
- Luca Bianchi, Head of Department at the Italian Ministry of Agriculture
- Elena Saraceno, Consultant at European Commission