



Agricultural & Rural
Inspiration Awards

Agriculture & Rural Inspiration Awards 2026:

When equality powers the next generation

GUIDELINES FOR ENTRY SUBMISSION

Agriculture and Rural Inspiration Awards (ARIA) 2026 focus on good practice projects supported by the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in line with the [Vision for Food and Agriculture](#) and the [Rural Pact](#). This year's themes will spotlight "gender equality" and "generational renewal", reflecting priority areas for the EU CAP Network and its stakeholders.

ARIA objectives

- To increase the visibility of agriculture and rural development in the EU.
- To demonstrate innovative solutions having an effect on rural communities.
- To explore the tools being used to support skills development, training and employment of young people in rural areas.
- To highlight projects that involve women and advance gender equality.
- To highlight and showcase best practice examples.
- To identify projects which signal a step change in approach, are inspirational or have the potential to be widely transferable within rural communities and thereby may contribute to building an attractive and inspiring agri-food sector (as set out in the Vision for Agriculture and Food).
- To promote knowledge exchange and networking among rural and agricultural stakeholders.
- To assist NNs in the following tasks:
 - the collection of examples of projects and best practices;
 - provide project examples to support the work of the EU CAP Network; and
 - facilitating thematic and analytical exchanges.



ARIA thematic categories

1. **Smart and competitive agriculture:** CAP-funded projects that contribute to a smart, competitive, diversified and more resilient agricultural sector by supporting digitalisation in farming, and by improving productivity, risk management, market access and bargaining power.
2. **Environmental protection:** CAP-funded projects that enhance environmental sustainability, address climate change, support biodiversity, and contribute to increased water resilience, climate adaptation and green recovery.
3. **Socio-economic fabric of rural areas:** CAP-funded projects that reinforce the wider rural economy and community beyond primary production, by creating non-agricultural jobs, addressing social inclusion in innovative ways, improving local services and infrastructure, generating social capital and promoting community-led initiatives in rural territories, and empowering rural entrepreneurs and businesses.
4. **Gender equality:** CAP-funded projects that clearly empower women in agriculture and rural areas, for example, by supporting their leadership and entrepreneurship, improving their access to resources and opportunities, or fostering more inclusive decision-making and working environments.

Cross-cutting theme

A **cross-cutting theme** will highlight projects that demonstrate enhancing generational renewal across all four categories. The jury will select a winner from the 24 shortlisted CAP-funded projects, specifically those that promote vibrant rural communities by engaging young people while developing their skills and creating high-quality rural jobs throughout any of its stages. Any project submitted in any category that advances generational renewal is eligible for this cross-cutting award.

Popular vote

The **popular vote** will be awarded to one of the 24 shortlisted CAP-funded projects, and it will be chosen through a public vote.

ARIA award criteria (applied within each category)

The **award criteria** will include the following:

- **Direct benefits:** evidence of concrete positive outcomes such as job creation, environmental improvements, market/policy uptake, increased sustainability and/or greater resilience.
- **Networking benefits:** evidence of links with other projects and initiatives, stakeholder involvement, creation of synergies, and, where relevant, connection to National Network activities and priorities.
- **Transferability potential:** clear potential for the project's approach, tools or results to be scaled or replicated in other geographical areas, sectors or organisations.



- **Innovative aspect:** evidence that the project has created new or significantly improved processes, services, products and/or technologies compared to “business as usual” in its context.
- **Gender equality:** evidence of involvement of women at the project management and implementation level and/or as beneficiaries, as well as how the project contributed to advancing gender equality in the target area.
- **Cross-cutting theme on ‘Generational renewal’:** Projects that actively include youth in their activities will not be awarded extra points. However, a section in the final descriptions of the projects will be added to the Good Practice template so that the jury and readers are informed about the inclusion of youth in the projects. This includes evidence of active youth involvement through skills development, high-quality job creation in rural areas, participation in decision-making, or youth-focused initiatives, training sessions, and networking targeted at younger age groups (under 40).

IMPORTANT !

NN/NSUs **must** submit their project to the category that best reflects its primary objectives and strongest results. Before applying, please **read the [category descriptions](#) and [assessment criteria](#)** carefully and select the category where your project can make the clearest and strongest case, in order to maximise its scoring potential.

Eligibility criteria and process

- The projects may only be submitted by [National Networks/National Support Units \(NN/NSUs\)](#). Projects that are submitted by non-NN/NSU contacts will not be considered.
- All projects must have been funded by the CAP during the 2014-2022 and the 2023-2027 periods. Projects that are funded in the 2023-2027 period are preferable.
- Projects should, as a general rule, be completed. Exceptions are made for projects funded from the 2023-2027 period, and land management actions under annual/multi-annual commitments (e.g., agri-environment, forestry). For entries by ongoing projects, these must already be sufficiently advanced to be able to demonstrate impact or transferability.
- Up to eight (8) projects can be submitted per NN/NSU, this may include up to three (3) LEADER projects.
- **Each NN/NSU can submit entries** for any or all of the four themed categories and is responsible for nominating projects to the most appropriate category. A project can only be nominated in one category!
- Projects from **operational groups** that were submitted in the EIP AGRI Awards are allowed to participate in the ARIA Awards unless they won an award at the EIP AGRI edition.
- The templates must be submitted in **English** and in **Word** (please do not share PDF files).



- All final project nominations by **NNs/NSUs must be submitted to the EU CAP Network by 8 July**. This date will only be communicated to NNs/NSUs, who can select their own deadlines for project submission.
- An online environment will be used to upload applications and all visual material.
- Evaluation will start in mid-July, and further information about the applications will be shared in early September.
- There will be 24 shortlisted candidates and six prize winners.
- No previously **shortlisted** RIA/ARIA entries may be (re)submitted.

Please ask any questions to: aria@eucapnetwork.eu.

