



Prospects for Farmers' Support:
Advisory Services in European AKIS

AKIS and advisory services in Malta

Report for the AKIS inventory (WP3) of the PRO AKIS project

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Executive summary

The main aim of the report is to provide a comprehensive description of the Agricultural Knowledge and Information System (AKIS) in the Republic of Malta, with a particular focus on agricultural advisory services. The description includes history, policy, funding, advisory methods and a section on how the Farm Advisory System (FAS) was implemented.

This report represents an output of the PRO AKIS project (Prospects for Farmers' Support: Advisory Services in the European Agricultural Knowledge and Information Systems'). It is one of 27 country reports that were produced in 2013 by project partners and subcontractors for compiling an inventory of Agricultural Knowledge and Information Systems. AKIS describe the exchange of knowledge and supporting services between many diverse actors from the first, second or third sector in rural areas. AKIS provide farmers with relevant knowledge and networks around innovations in agriculture. Findings from the 27 country reports were presented at three regional workshops across Europe in February and March 2014, discussed with stakeholders and experts, and feedback integrated in the reports.

The agricultural sector in Malta is characterised by structural deficits such as fragmentation, a high average age of farmers and high land prices for agricultural land, of which two thirds are owned by the State. The holdings are lacking in both innovation and entrepreneurship, mainly due to the protectionist economy which characterised Malta until the accession to the EU and the very low degree of farmers' education.

Since the EU accession, the Maltese AKIS is undergoing a shift from a centralised model, where the National level provided all services through its own departments, to a semi-public one, where the Ministry participates in the management of the advisory system together with the professionals (FAS Consortium) and the farmers (cooperatives and POs). Nowadays, the AKIS is characterised by a certain number of entities with a very low amount of knowledge flows and operational synergies among them, and weak linkages with the farmers. The FAS consortium is the only body entitled to award organisations the status of farm advisory services; research is mainly carried out by public and non profit organisations; some cooperatives and other private companies provide technical assistance to farmers; the College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) and the University are responsible for higher education and agricultural research.

In addition to the FAS Consortium, other entities provide technical assistance, on the basis of different sources of funding: the RDP, the membership fees paid by the associates, the ordinary national budget, the common marketing organisation (CMO) and the specific funding schemes applied only to POs, and the central cooperative fund (CCF). Actually, 6 agricultural advice companies, 18 cooperatives, 19 POs, 2 NGOs, are involved, differing in size, staff, number of clients, offered services, methods and topics of advisory.

Particularly, the cooperatives and the producers' organisations demonstrate that they are crucial in fostering knowledge exchange and implementation of innovation at the farm level, by enlarging their traditional domains to matters more related to rural development. They are likely to play a crucial role in developing a major acknowledgement on the utility of advisory services, through their involvement in advisory mechanisms, as well as brokering relevant actors around innovation projects.

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List of Acronyms

AKIS – Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System
ATB – Assoċjazzjoni tal-Bdiewa (Farmers Association)
AWU – Annual Work Unit
BICREF – Biological Conservation Research Foundation
EC – European Commission
EU – European Union
FADN - Farm Accountancy Data Network
FASRB – Farm Advisory Registration Board
FAS – Farm Advisory System
FASC – FAS Consortium
GAEC – Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions
GVA – Gross Value Added
GDP – Gross Domestic Product
ICT – Information and Communication Technologies
KIM – Koperattiva ta Min Irabbi l-Majjal Ltd. (Pork Breeders Cooperative Pork Ltd.)
KPH – Koperattiva Produtturi tal-Halib Ltd (Milk Producers Cooperative Ltd.)
LSU – LiveStock Unit
MA – Managing Authority (of the RDP)
MCAST – Malta College of Arts, Science & Technology
MEPA – Malta Environment and Planning Authority
MOAM – Malta Organic Agriculture Movement
MSDEC – Ministry for Sustainable Development, the Environment and Climate change
NARS – National Agricultural Research System
NGO – Non Governmental Organization
NRDN – National Rural Development Network
NSOM – National Statistics Office of Malta
PG – Producer Group
PHD – Plant Health Directorate
PO – Producer Organization
RDP – Rural Development Programme
SME – Small Medium Enterprise
SMR – Statutory Management Requirements
UUA – Utilized Agricultural Area

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1. Main structural characteristics of agricultural sector of the country

Malta consists of an Archipelago of three inhabited islands (approximately 320 km² and 140 km coastline), with no mountains, lakes, rivers or streams. It is the smallest EU Member State populated by 417,520 inhabitants. In spite of the on-going crisis in the euro area, in 2013, its real GDP grew by 0.8%¹, compared with a 0.6% contraction in the euro area, and it is likely to outperform the euro area accelerating to 1.4% in 2013. The 6.803 million euros of GDP reached in 2012 equates to 4,157 euros per capita, which represents the 86.0 % of the EU-27 average. According to the national statistics, in 2012, agriculture represented the 1.7% of total GDP.

In the last few decades Malta has experienced a transition from a predominantly agrarian society to industrialized and urban communities and is currently classified as totally urban. In 2012, the agricultural sector accounted for 90,843 of GVA which represented only 2.2% of the total GVA generated by the Maltese economy and employed 3.2% of the total gainfully employed persons. However, agriculture has multiple functions and a value beyond its economic contribution, in terms of maintaining the quality of the landscape, shaping the rural landscape and the environmental character of the islands and it is also an integral component of the cultural heritage and a crucial backdrop to the tourism industry.

Due to a customary inheritance practice dictating that farmland be divided between offspring on the death of the tenant, the Maltese agriculture is characterised by structural deficits such as the fragmentation (average size of the holdings is 1.6 ha) and high land prices for agricultural land, which prevent potential entrepreneurs from acquiring their own land for agricultural purposes and is a heavy deterrent to genuine new farming entrants. Also, two thirds of the agricultural land in the Maltese Islands is owned by the State, 76% of the agricultural land area cultivated is rented, with only 24% being owner occupied.

According to the latest Agriculture Census of 2010, the primary sector counted 12,530 agricultural holdings (2% with other gainful activities), by employing a labour force of 18,539 persons, which represents 10.6 % of the Maltese economically active population (+ 3,5% in the period 2003-2010). Among them, the number of sole holders working on the farms were 12,110 (this represents 65.5% of the total work force in agriculture and 70% of the total AWU, of which only 12.1% were female and 4.8% were farmers under 35). The workforce (sole holders + family members) was 5,520 (29.8%) and 870 persons working as non-family labour force. Among them, the number of agricultural holdings receiving direct payments in 2012 were 61 and the FADN holdings in 2009 were 1,470.

The utilized agricultural area (UAA) reached 11.450 hectares, by increasing of 6.1% in the period 2003-2010. In spite of the decrease registered for the period 2003-2010, arable use covers 79% of the total UUA, by registering a share of 11% of the total Agricultural standard output (€), almost 11% is cultivated by permanent crops (+15% in the period 2003-2010) and 9.8% is taken up by kitchen gardens.

¹ Data in this § are gathered from the National Statistics Office of Malta (NSO) and the Eurostat. The most of the data refer to the Agriculture Census 2010.

Over the 2003-2010 period, the population of livestock (LSU) decreased by 12.3% reaching the number of 42,910, which means a livestock density of 3.7 per UUA, and the number of agricultural holdings with livestock (2,740) as well (-10%). Among them, the holdings with 5 to 9 LSU represent 79%, by running 5% of the total livestock and 54% of the total number of livestock is run by 4% of the total holdings with a size of 100 - < 500 LSU. The total animal production was 11,121 thousand (t), 41% of which is pig production and 27% by cattle production.

Still in 2010, the potential support for biodiversity was mostly addressed by the organic farming which covered 26% of the total UAA, 18.7% of which was on an undergoing conversion to organic farming. Though, the total number of holdings running organic farming was 13. With regards to the environmental data, the potential surplus of nitrogen on agricultural land was 174.25 (kg/ha/year in 2000-2008) and the total ammonia emissions from agriculture was at 1.5.

2. Characteristics of AKIS

2.1 AKIS description

Since the accession of Malta to the EU, in 2004, the whole agricultural policy has been shaped by the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), by influencing the Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS) approach, roles and functions.

Nowadays, the Maltese agricultural knowledge and innovation system (AKIS) is characterised by a certain number of entities with a very low level of coordination and interactions between them.

According to some local experts and public managers, the advisory and the research worlds are not so close, even if this study let a certain degree of dynamism emerge. In depth, in Malta, the Ministry for Sustainable Development, the Environment and Climate change (MSDEC) has always shaped the behaviours and performance of the researchers, entrepreneurs, advisors and trainers, through directly providing the extension services (NARS in Hall, Janssen, Pehu & Rajalahti, 2006). Besides, in recent years, although the MSDEC introduced a process of transition to a de-concentrated model, it is still maintaining a top-down approach which is reflected in the setting of both the infrastructures and mechanisms, which should lead, in principle, to knowledge and innovation dynamics. Moreover, the pressure on the AKIS actors, after the accession, has been intensified due to the application of the European regulatory framework, particularly on cross-compliance. To a certain extent, it can be said that the national RDP 2007-2013 is contributing to re-organising the roles and functions of the AKIS actors (also introducing new stakeholders) and to set the stage for building bridges between them. Indeed, the national perspective does not seem to be systemic and drives the AKIS actors in at least two different directions, without facilitating their cooperation for knowledge transfer purpose: one regards the enhancement of human capital and is particularly targeted to help increasing the competitiveness of the value chains; the other regards the support to the farmers and livestock breeders to meet the requirements of EU and National regulation, mainly with regards to Cross Compliance requirements and Health and Safety standards. Accordingly, this last area is under the responsibility of the FAS, while the first belongs to other subjects, mostly associative bodies (cooperatives and producer organisations/groups).

Indeed, this situation reflects the lack of a common strategic framework on knowledge transfer and innovation. The main priorities of knowledge and innovation policies are largely determined at the government level, although without specific programmes.

The National Strategic Plan for Rural Development for 2007-2013 identifies the major structural and directional needs for the agro-food sector, on the basis of an analysis of the situation in terms of strengths and weaknesses, as follows:

- offer differentiated, high quality products and services;
- promote environmentally friendly production methods;
- diversify and develop the multifunctional role of rural enterprises.

Research and advice should contribute towards advancements in these areas, by developing new products, new processes and new technologies in line with the identified objectives and needs.

The main agricultural research in Malta is carried out by the MSDEC through its Departments (see annotation to annex 9.1), which are responsible for their respective research area and have their own research budgets on extension and advisory services, without any coordination between them. Some research activities are carried out in collaboration with the University of Malta, whose leading institute in agricultural research is the Department of Rural Sciences and Food Systems within the Institute of Earth Systems (before, Institute of Agriculture). The Department conducts research in agricultural sciences with particular reference to the needs of Maltese agriculture whilst still providing professional advisory and extension services to the local farming community.

Public research is funded by National and International programmes (i.e. FP7). It is conducted mostly on a project-based basis without a specific research strategy. This means that access to grants for research is not on a competitive basis. In most cases, funds for research are obtained indirectly and are linked to mainstream activities, such as regulatory or advisory operations. Moreover, since research projects are not in line with an established strategy or framework programme, they are often carried out in response to short-term needs and lack of continuity and complementarity, as well as of a real liaison with the needs of farmers and rural areas.

Among the other public organisations, the Malta Environment and Planning Authority (MEPA), which is the national agency responsible for land use planning and environmental regulation, manages on-going policy-oriented research programmes that includes the rural environment and the agricultural landscape.

Private companies and SMEs are, to a small extent, active in the research field, while non-governmental organisations (namely, Biological Conservation Research Foundation (BICREF) and Malta Organic Agricultural Movement (MOAM)) show certain pro-activeness.

To improve knowledge transfer mechanisms enabling the transformation of knowledge into innovative products and services, in the last years, the interaction between businesses and academic institutions was increased, aware of the contribution that education can give to the business development and growth.

The University of Malta and the College for Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) are the main bodies within the Ministry of Education, responsible for higher education and agricultural research. In particular, MCAST which is administered by the University of Malta, is the main provider of all post-compulsory, post-16 vocational education and training in Malta and Gozo. Among its ten institutes, the Agribusiness Institute provides training in horticulture, animal care and management as well as fish management. The majority of programmes offered by the Institute are either attended by students on a full-time basis, or by apprentices. The Institute also offers a part-time evening programme and day courses for adults who are in employment and/or who would like to update their skills. Unfortunately the formal training seems to be largely inadequate and does not provide a synergy between academic instructions and applications on a farm. It has emerged from the stakeholder consultations that the formal training available is not addressing the actual and emerging needs of the sector, such as the need for innovative farming

and animal breeding and for carrying out agri-business. Moreover, there are a lack of professional skills and competences on specific matters such as veterinary medicine.

Since the CAP reform concerning the programming period 2007-2013, certain dynamism is characterising the AKIS, while new and old actors are providing services related to the transfer of knowledge both under the framework of public (RDP measures and other EU programmes) schemes and private funding. Among the others, private companies, farmers' cooperatives, Producers Organisations/Groups (POs/PGs) and NGOs (see the tables 1 and 2).

In addition, the implementation of a FAS scheme, under the measures 114 and 115 of RDP 2007-2013, fostered the set-up of new private advisors, although, in the end, only a semi-public entity was formally recognised as a farm advisory service provider (FAS Consortium – FASC – in box on page 14).

Furthermore, still under the EU framework, the National Rural Development Network (NRDN), which Coordination Committee implies the representatives of the key organisations involved in rural development coming from the Livestock sector, Fruit and vegetable sector, Producer's Organisations/groups and the cooperatives, has been active in facilitating the dialogue between the AKIS actors, through conducting the stakeholder consultation for supporting the MA in developing the RD strategy for the next programming period, as well as providing specialised information to farmers on the cross-compliance.

Eventually, due to the emerging needs for farm mechanisation² and new fertilisation practises the suppliers are becoming more and more active in the AKIS, through shaping the innovation trends in agriculture.

Table 1. Overview of the main service suppliers in Malta

Name of organisation	Status	Services offered	Main links	Advisory topics	RDP Meas. applied
FAS Consortium	Public/private part.	Advisory services, training (in the next future)	Ministry, KPH, KIM	Cross-compliance	115
APS Consult	Private	Advisory services (business plan, application forms, credit forms, etc.)	University, public authorities, private companies	Plant/animal production, rural development, environment, renewable energies	115
FAS Co-op	Private	Advisory services	Other cooperatives, University	GAECs, health and safety standards, cross compliance, CAP payments and RD measures, compilation of application forms, farm management plans, good farming practices, etc.	115

² According to the National Statistics Office of Malta, the second quarter of 2013, the machinery and investment index increased by 1.2 per cent on account of higher prices paid for materials (+3.2 per cent) and buildings (+0.1 per cent).

Milk Producers Cooperative Ltd. (KPH)	Private	Cattle breeding services, installation and servicing of farm structures and equipment, hoof trimming and care, other advisory, research and educational services.	Ministry, KIM, FAS Consortium	Services are related to all aspects of dairy farm management, milk production. Under meas. 124 KPH runs a research project about nutrition and milk production in the local sector	124, 111, 115
Pork Breeders Cooperative Pork Ltd. (KIM)	Private	AI education, training and advisory services, supply of farm inputs and equipment, veterinary products, breeding stocks	Ministry, KPH, FAS Consortium	Vaccination, farm management and animal health, cross-compliance	115
MOAM - Malta Organic Agriculture Movement	Private	Information and training	Ministry, other NGOs, EU, IFOAM	Organic agriculture, animal welfare, environment	111
Farmers Association (ATB)	Private	Training courses and advisory services, market facilities	Ministry, EU, POs	Farm management, markets, CAP payments and RD measures	111
Viticulture Producers Organisation Malta	Private	Technical and general advice related to viticultural sector	Ministry, University, EU partners	Quality of productions, farm management, water management	124; 142 Italia-Malta project
Tomato producers cooperative Malta Ltd	Private	Technical and advisory assistance in tomato production and processing		Quality of production	
University of Malta	Public	Information services	Ministry	Modern technologies	
Ministry Divisions	Public	Advisory and information services	All actors	Phytosanitary issues and other topics aimed at increasing awareness and informing farmers and the wider public	
Outlook Cooperative	Private	Training courses		Business activities	111
Association of Producers/ Agricultural Cooperative Gozo	Private				
Gozitano producers organization	Private				124
Malta Dairy Products Ltd	Private	Dairy processing plant	KPH		124
Tomato Producers Society Gozo	Private				124

2.2 AKIS diagram

Figure 1. Graphic representation of AKIS in Malta

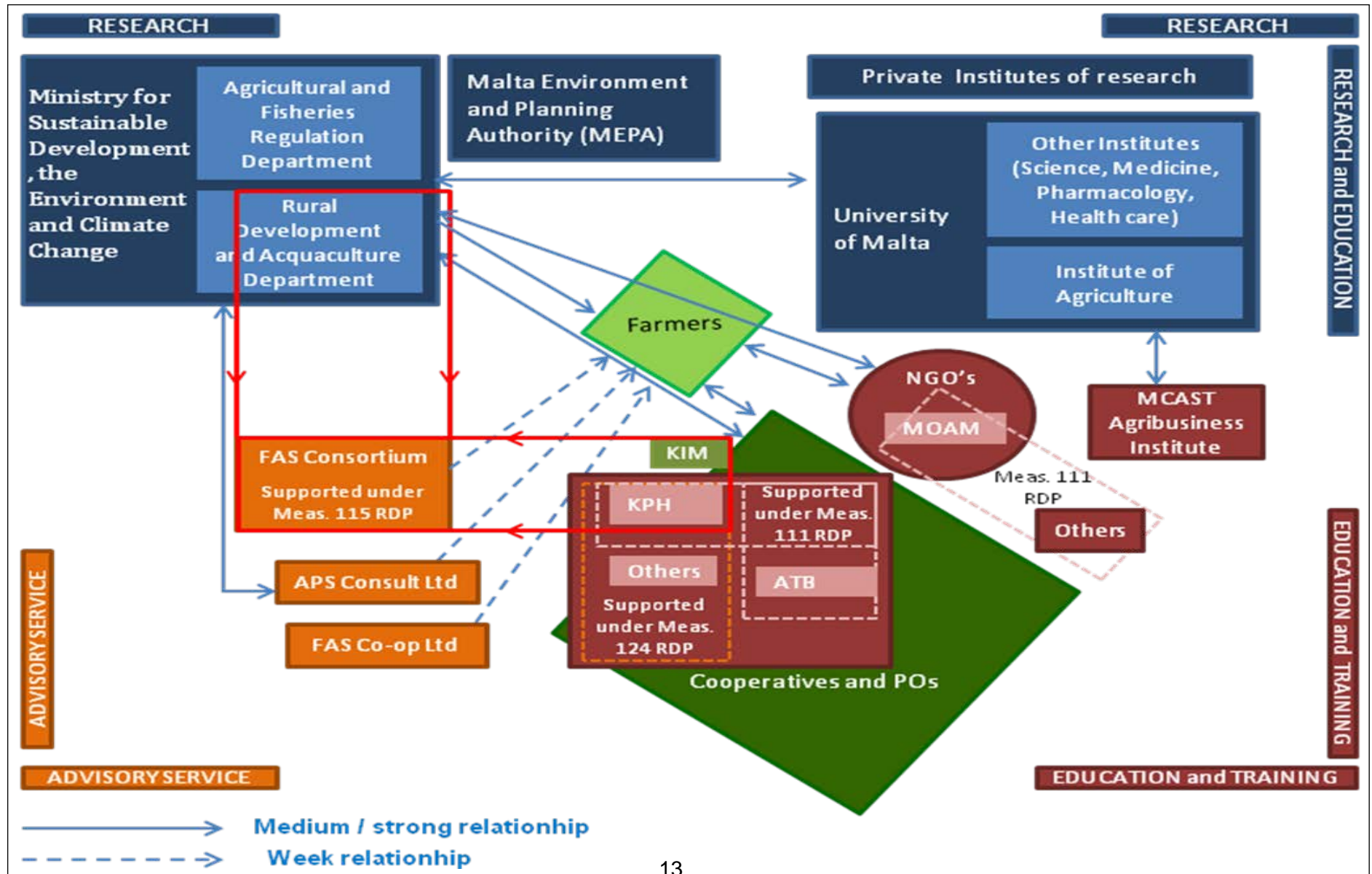


Table 2. Overview of organisations creating the AKIS

Provision of service				Source of financing								
Status of the organisation	Type of organisation	Number of organisations	Number of advisors	Public funds			Farmers			Private	NGO	Other (specify)
				EU funds	National funds	Regional funds	Farmers' levies	Farmers' contribution	Billing services	Other products (inputs, outputs)	foundation	
Public sector	Advisory department of the Ministry of Agriculture											
	Local/regional agencies											
	Other (departments and divisions of the Ministry of Agriculture / other ministries)	<5	0	X	X							
Research and Education	University	1	0	X	X							
	Research Institute	3	0									
	Other education bodies (MCAST)	1	0		X							
Private sector	Upstream industries											
	Downstream industries											
	Independent consultant											
	Private agricultural advice company	3	6-10	X					X			
	Farmer's owned advice company											
Farmer based organisations	Farmers' cooperative	18	NA	X				X				
	Chambers of agriculture											
	Farmer's circles / groups											
	Other (Producer organisations, Farmers' groups)	19	NA	X	X			X				
NGO		2	NA	X							X	
Public/private partnership	FAS	1	10	X				X				

3. History of the advisory system

Until recently, the MSDEC offered a free of charge extension service, that was carried out by the agriculture graduates within the Ministry itself, many of which were assigned to research and extension work. This was mainly because of a lack of qualified personnel in the private agricultural sector. In fact, it was only in 1993, with the setting up of the Institute of Agriculture (IoA) run by the University of Malta, and more recently with the establishment of an the Agri-business Institute run by the Malta College of Science and Technology (MCAST), that agricultural education ventured into the tertiary education level. In the meantime, the Maltese agricultural sector has been operating on the basis of a cooperative philosophy. Most of farmers were, and still are, cooperatives' members (around 41%), mainly because in the pre-accession protectionist agricultural policy, co-operatives and their federations have been seen as political pressure groups claiming to government for protection and subsidies. Since the EU accession, given the increasing administrative burden to implement the agriculture *acquis* and manage the EU funds and programmes, most of agriculture graduates within the Ministry have been reassigned to administrative duties. Consequently, during 2006, the five extension service offices of MSDEC, which represented the only formal advisory services for farmers, were reduced to only two, one in Malta and one in Gozo, which basically handle the farmers' applications for public funds (direct aid, RDP measures and other public aid schemes).

With these changes in the governmental settings the need for shifting the approach to the extension services to a semi-public model, by involving the private sector emerged. Indeed, because this just happened near the start of the 2007-2013 programming period, it helped the Ministry responsible for agriculture (de-concentration model) to take the initiative for restructuring the advisory facilities in compliance with the renewed CAP and the specific regulations of the FAS, in view of taking advantage of the co-funding of the measures 114 and 115 of the RDP of Malta 2007-2013 for the set-up and the use of the FAS (Ministry for Rural Affairs and the Environment, 2007). However, in view of avoiding the risk that the farmers could resort to unofficial sources of information (mainly commercial agents of input providers), the MSDEC conducted this transition process through retaining a certain level of governmental management (regulation, monitoring and public support) and control of the advisors and on the services to be provided. Later on, in 2011, this occurrence led to the establishment of the FAS Consortium (see box on page 11), which is essentially an institutionalised advisory and extension services provider.

Besides, the implementation of the RDP 2007-2013 served also the entry of new entities which, unless being formally in charge of FASs, act as extension services providers and/or are contributing to spreading knowledge across the farmers. Among them, the cooperatives and the producer organisations, which have an important background in Malta (see box) and demonstrate that they are crucial in the provision of both training and advisory services. In particular this study highlighted that through participating in the RDP (namely measures 111, 115, 124 and 142) they are enlarging the domains on which they historically provided services to farmers (basically organising auctions for products sales and providing information on marketing issues) to matters more related to rural development, such as quality of products, consumer policies, organic agriculture, cross compliance and global management of the farmers. Here, the major

funding gathered under the measures 124 and 142 of the RDP 2007-2013 let the old ones consolidating their positions and favouring the set-up of new ones, by ensuring the provision of such services and developing new cooperation modes for innovation and support, which appear being better targeted to farmers.

Among the other new actors of the AKIS, as already mentioned in § 2.1, the National Rural Development Network (NRDN), since the beginning of the programming period, has been active in providing technical information on the cross-compliance directly to farmers and helping them addressing their needs (and claims) on training and advisory services.

Background of cooperatives and producers organisations

Cooperatives - Historical Background

The cooperative model was introduced by the Cooperative Societies Ordinance IN 1946 and, since then, a certain number of cooperatives have been set up and operated in different economic sectors of Malta. The major aim of the agricultural cooperatives is to organise the farmers for selling their products on the markets, through overtaking the structural limitation of small-farms. Practically, they act like middlemen – sale by auction, though without promoting any vertical integration across the value chains and having not yet embarked on a proper programme of adding value to produce. They basically rely on government financial assistance, which includes tax considerations, cash injections, staff endorsements and import controls via seasonal quotas and tariffs. In 2001, the Cooperative Societies Act set up the Koperattivi Malta, which is national organisation of Maltese Cooperatives with the mission of representing and promoting the cooperative movement in the Maltese Islands, through providing vital services to its members in the fields of education, training, and management consultancy. Nowadays, there are 19 agricultural cooperatives in Malta, out of the total 68, and they represent 5,117 farmers (around 41% of all Maltese farmers). Across the years, the cooperatives successfully played their role on the produce wholesale market and retailing operations, while failing in the representativeness of the sector and demonstrated to be organisationally weak, lacking in members' loyalty and support, and often without strong effective leadership. Under the RDP they are beneficiaries of the measure 111, 124 and, through the partnership forming the FAS Consortium (KIM and KPH), also the measure 115.

Producers Organisations – Historical Background

The Producer Organisations started to be set up following the accession to the EU and, under the national and European framework which was settled in the years 2002-2007 (Act No IX of 2002; Legal Notice 63 of 2004; Legal Notice 237 of 2007) they operate within the Common Market Organisation (CMO) in the relevant sectors (including fruit, vegetables, products for processing, citrus fruits, nuts and mushrooms) by gathering financial assistance from the European Agriculture and Guarantee Fund (EAGF).

The rationales for setting up a Producer Organisation regard basically protecting the market share if the producers, by increasing their capacity to access market information and undertake new marketing activities as well as to improve the producers' ability to meet legislative and other constraints.

In this view, the POs/PGs members are required to market the totality of their products, unless authorized to sell up to 25% directly to consumers. Nowadays, the PO/PGs are 19. Under the RDP 2007-2013, 3 PO/PGs are beneficiaries of measure 142, by representing the poultry, rabbit and wine grapes producers.

4. The Agricultural Advisory Service(s)

4.1 Overview of all service suppliers

Following the shift towards a de-concentrated model to be applied to the provision of the advisory and extension services to farmers, currently, in Malta there are three major types of suppliers: public, private and semi-public bodies.

The public bodies are mainly represented by governmental departments, all coming under the authority of the MSDEC, that operate through their own civil servants. They still play a relevant role in delivering information and advice to farmers on matters mainly relating to compliance with relevant legislation on health and safety of agro-food products, water and waste management, veterinary services, including the use of governmental abattoir premises, soil and nitrates. Particularly, the Department for Rural Development and Aquaculture and the Agriculture and Fisheries Regulation Department are directly involved in fostering knowledge dissemination, increasing awareness and informing farmers and the wider public, through organizing lectures and mass media campaigns. Indeed, one of their missions is to develop and implement research programmes, provide technical and scientific support for policy design, while providing advisory and extension services to the farming community. Particularly, the Plant Health Directorate (PHD), within the Agriculture and Fisheries Regulation Department assists farmers and the general public on a number of phytosanitary issues.

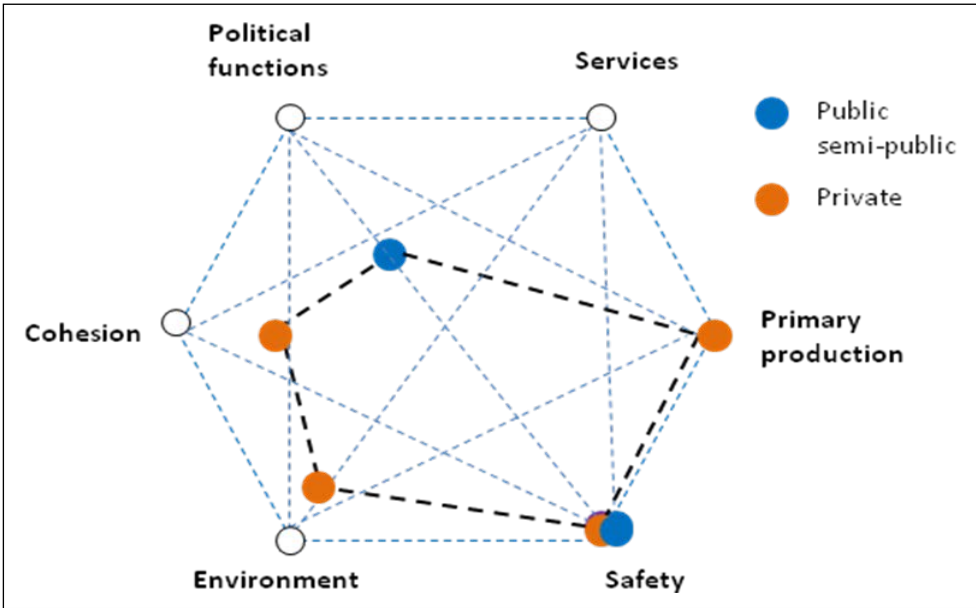


Figure 2. Functions assigned to agricultural advisory services in Malta

The semi-public bodies are basically represented by the FAS Consortium, which is the only organisation officially recognised as a FAS institution, in accordance with the Council Regulations 1782/2003 and 73/2009, and under the Legal Notice 113 of 2010. However, since its management was only engaged in September 2012 and the measure 114 has been not yet implemented, at the moment, it basically provides advisory services to farmers which occurred penalties for not being compliant with the cross compliance requirements.

The private bodies are fully owned by private entities or individuals. They offer a variety of services to their members/clients, by employing their own staff and external advisors. In Malta they are mainly represented by producers' organisations (POs) and cooperatives. These historically had a significant role in fostering knowledge and enhance skills of their members. The services they provide are mainly aimed at ensuring the marketisation of products and the provision of the best quality products at affordable prices. This includes advisory and training, supplying with seeds, fertilizers and farming equipment, auctions and connections with international cooperatives movements, in view of sharing practices (namely veterinary practices). Although, recently they've been providing vocational training and other advisory services which directly address the need for support of the farmers investing in capital assets, innovation and modernizing the holdings under the RDP framework. Among the others, the KPH (Milk Producers Cooperative Ltd) and the KIM (Pork Producers Cooperative Ltd), help providing formal farm advisory services related to the cross compliance through being partners of the FASC.

THE FAS CONSORTIUM

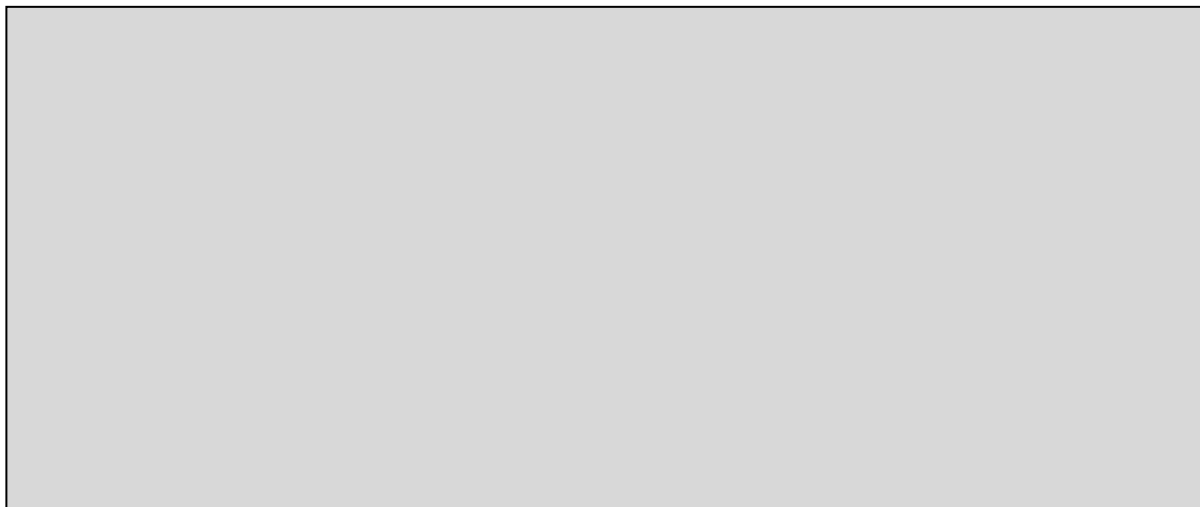
The Ministry for Sustainable Development, the Environment and Climate Change (MSDEC). Its portfolio includes Climate Change Policy, Environmental Policy, Waste Management Strategy, National Parks, Afforestation and the Countryside, Rural Development, Agriculture, Horticulture, Fisheries, Aquaculture, Animal Welfare and Veterinary Services.

The Koperattiva Produtturi tal-Halib Ltd (KPH), established in 1958 and incorporating all the local licensed milk producers delivering their milk to the dairy. It encounters 129 members. KPH is committed to reduce the farm input costs, to sustain a market and to get the best value for the members' produce – milk and beef. To reach these objectives over the years KPH invested heavily and developed a vertical structure to run its core business. KPH, in addition to being the leading importer of cereals and other feedstuffs in Malta, owns and runs one of the main feed mills in the country producing and selling compound feeds for the various livestock sectors – dairy, beef, pigs, poultry and rabbit. KPH is also active in the supply of farm equipment and consumables, artificial insemination and cattle breeding services, farm insurance, training, farm support and advisory services to help members to upgrade their farm facilities and operations and to improve quality and efficiency. KPH has two subsidiary companies: one subsidiary owns and runs the dairy processing plant in Malta and processes all the milk delivered from Malta and Gozo, while the other assists local producers to find a market for the beef produced locally at the best possible prices.

Koperattiva ta Min Irabbi l-Majjal Ltd. (KIM), established in 1983 by pig breeders to sell their pigs for slaughter through it. Since all the local pig breeders are members, the cooperative enjoys 100% market share in the slaughter and sale of local pig carcasses. It encounters 166 members. In May 2010, KIM was also registered as a Producer Organisation. In view of the drop in demand for local pig meat, KIM started to debone and sell pork cuts and launched a promotion campaign in favor of local fresh pork. KIM is very active in improving efficiency and quality on the farms; in providing other services to the members particularly supply of farm inputs and equipment, veterinary products, breeding stocks, AI education, training and advisory services.

This category also include two entities – APS Consult Ltd. and Farm Advisory Services Co-op Limited (see the box on page 16) – which, although recognised as farm advisory service providers according to the Legal Notice 113 of 2010, did not attain the minimum score for

support granted under measure 115 of RDP afterwards and, therefore had to provide advisory services without public funding.



Moreover, in recent years, the emergence of new private actors, such as NGOs and a few private companies, which provide a variety of technical advices (business plan, application forms, credit questionnaires, renewable energies, etc.), should be observed.

In particular, the NGOs are relatively recent organisations in Malta, aimed at acting as agents of social change in view of safeguarding the well-being of the rural development. Among them, the Malta Organic Agriculture Movement (MOAM) is very active in promoting organic agriculture in Malta, through organising training courses, sharing practices and disseminating ideas and methods among the wide public. Also it acts as a pressure group and in coordination with some environmental bodies and NGOs, both locally as well as internationally, it set-up the specific national organic agriculture standards and coordinates the product certification on organic agriculture in Malta. Its members include farmers, consumers, technical people and many others who have the local natural environment at heart.

4.2 Public policy, funding schemes and financing mechanisms

The Maltese policy framework on the FAS is basically defined by the National Rural Development Strategy Plan 2007-2013³ (NRDSP), the RDP 2007-2013 and the national Legal Notice 113/2010⁴ (table 3). These provide the basic strategy, the main objectives, the implementing rules, the funding schemes and the mechanisms for the setting-up and the use of the farm advisory services, as well as for the vocational training and the follow up of the research in agriculture. Particularly the NRDSP, by recognising that the Maltese farmers need to be made aware of the relevant EU and National regulations, in particular cross compliance requirements and their implications, outlines the opportunity to use training, information and diffusion of knowledge (measure 111), as well as advisory services to help the farmers reach the required level of technical know-how and expertise (measures 114).

In this context, the setting up of the FAS is recognized as instrumental in helping farmers to adapt (measure 115), improve and facilitate management, and furthermore improve the overall

³ Published in September 2009.

⁴ Supplies and services act, cap. 117.

performance of their holdings by further enhancing the human potential operating in the agricultural sector. In addition, measure 111 of RDP supports the vocational training and information actions and, indirectly, promotes research in agriculture, by including the set-up of demonstration projects and experimental sites, as part of long-term research projects. Overall, the budget allocated for the three measures represents 6% of the total Axis 1 and almost 3% of the total allocations on the RDP of Malta.

However, other national funding schemes are applied to the cooperatives and the producers organisations, which in providing extension services to their own members (see § 3 and § 5.2) are financed by the ordinary national budget, by the common marketing organisation (CMO) funding schemes (applied only to POs), by the RDP measures 124 and 142, and by the membership fees paid by the associates. Still, for the case of the cooperatives, by the central cooperative fund (CCF) which is feed by the cooperatives themselves with a contribution of 5% of the surplus of each financial year. Also, in a small number of cases, some advisory companies are financed by the fees paid by the farmers for the provision of specific extension services.

Table 3. Funding schemes and financing mechanisms of the FAS

Funding schemes	Financing mechanisms			National extension coordinating structures
State budget	Cooperatives and producers organisations/groups are financed on national budget basis			
EU funds/RDP measures	111	Non-capital costs	* EAFRD on 75% * Malta on 25%	none
	114	maximum of 1,500€ per farmer per comprehensive service	* EAFRD on 75% * Malta on 25%	Farm Advisory Registration Board
	115	Rate at 100% of Maximum 100.000 euro	* EAFRD on 75% * Malta on 25%	
	124	Different rates to be applied to the Producer Group's annual marketed production	* Public contribution covers max 60% of the total eligible costs (max 120.000 per project) * EAFRD on 75% * Malta on 25%	Cooperatives Board
	142	Different rates to be applied to the Producer Group's annual marketed production	* EAFRD on 75% * Malta on 25%	Producer Organisation Board (POB)
Central Cooperative Fund (CCF)	Financed by the cooperatives through the contribution of 5% of the surplus of each financial year. movement in Malta			
Contracts with national state	Private advisory companies can be contractualised by the Ministry			
Fee for extension service paid by farmers	The membership fee paid by the farmers to the cooperatives and producer organisations/groups cover the costs for the provision of extension services			

Indeed, as it is regulated, the set up and implementation of the FAS implies a three-step procedure (see figure 3).

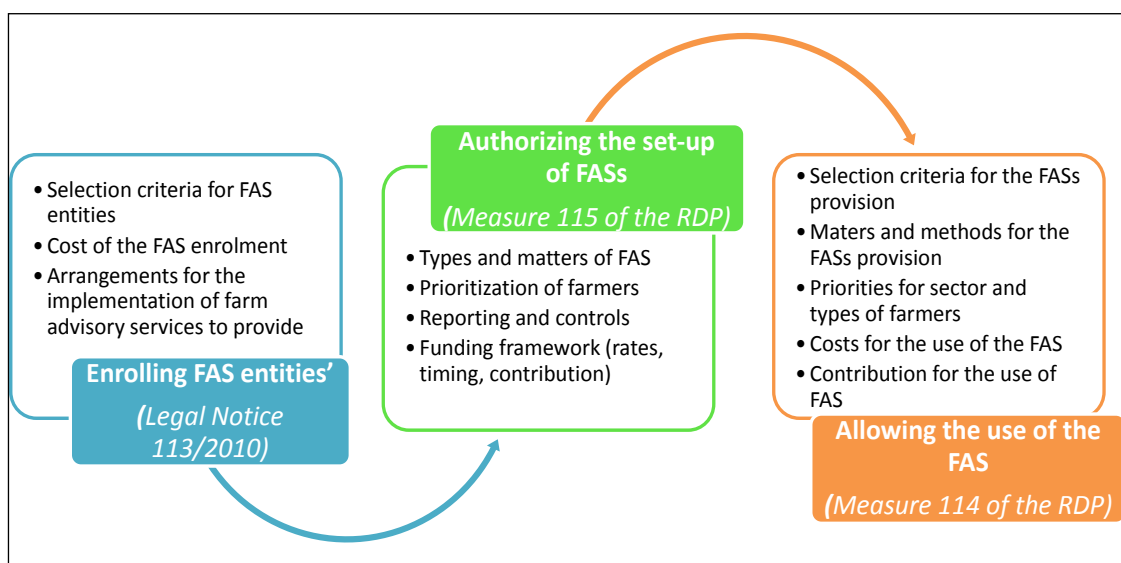


Figure 3. The three-steps model for the FAS implementation

With regards to the specific national framework, the Legal Notice 113/2010, regulates the selection and the enrolment of the FAS’ entities to the Farm Advisory Services Register⁵. This is subordinated to the compliance of a number of selection criteria that regard mainly the organisational engagements, the professional skills, the experience of the applicants, the costs of the enrolment and the rules for implementing and reporting the activities to be provided (table 4). Here, the selection criteria and the detailed requirements on the staff expertise and the recurrent training of the FAS team led to the strong interest of the MA to foster the continuous professional development of the FAS entities. In addition to the legal notice, the EU framework, by the measures 114 and 115, sets out the financing arrangements and the criteria for authorising the provision of the farm advisory services as well as for selecting the intended FAS users, defining the contents and the methods to be applied in the provision of the advisory services and the farmers’ costs for using the services.

Table 4. Arrangements for the set-up and implementation of the FAS

<p>Criteria for the selection of FAS entities</p>	<p><u>Skills and expertise requirements (40 scores):</u> - A core with two years’ experience and qualified technical experts, with an appropriate level of technical and economic based training and proven knowledge of: - CAP policies, cross compliance, good farming practices, CoGAP, health and safety, rural development measures and applications, agricultural production.</p> <p><u>Recurrent training for the FAS experts (40 scores):</u> Provision of a 2 year training plan addressing the members of the FAS entity and a consistent budget plan. This includes the attendance of a specialised training course approved by the Ministry on: cross compliance covering the obligations of the Statutory Management Requirements and Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions.</p> <p><u>Organization of the team and Segregation of competencies (scores 20):</u> - Clear separation of competences and functions: - Coordinator of the FASs</p>
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⁵ This is in charge of the Farm Advisory Services Registration Board (see §5.1).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Field inspectors: with a high degree and experience focusing on Cross compliance. Responsible for verifying the farmers' compliance to and help them to address the CC requirements field work - Other personnel with a more generic degree and experience. - An expert cannot be part of more than one Farm Advisory Service entity.
<i>Costs of registration for the FAS entities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Administrative fee = € 20 - Registration fee = € 150 - Yearly renewal fee = € 30
<i>Implementation of the FAS activities</i>	<p><u>Arrangements in favor of the intended users of the FAS:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organization of training courses in all technical areas covered by the regulation - Non conflict of interest with clients - Prioritize services to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - farmers who receive more than 15,000€ in direct aid, - those entered into an agro-environmental commitment, - holdings more commercially viable. - Services provision at minimum to 20 new individual farmers per year - Services plan covering at least for 5 years of provision. <p><u>Arrangements for own recurrent training:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Keeping records and periodic reporting on the services to provide - Allowing access to the FARB members in case of inspections. - Paying the yearly renewal fee. - Not disclosure of personal or individual information on clients. - Provisions of technical facilities & resources (ICT hardware and software; on-site - field and farm - instruments; office ware; reference materials, archive, and catalogue materials). - Control checks, through the evidence of the provision of such services. <p><u>Approaches and methods</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - One to one support, Mock farm inspections, Telephone support service, Small group advice on specific topics, Awareness raising events / seminars, Internet based tools.

Eventually, the use of the service is voluntary and it's provided on the basis of the payment of a registration fee, for the enrolment as intended user, and of a service fee, for the effective procurement of the service (see table 5). The advisory services are then provided only to the farmers who are registered and paid the fees.

Table 5. Financial arrangements for the use of the FASs

<i>Costs for the use of the FASs</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Registration fee as user = € 35 - Service fee = € 100
<i>Funding scheme of the use of the FASs</i>	<p><u>Contribution at maximum:</u> 1.500 euro:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 80% is granted under measure 114. - 20% is advanced by the Bank of Valletta.

4.3 Methods and Human Resources

In Malta, the approach to the delivery of farm advisory services is changing in line with the increasing involvement of associative and other private bodies.

Basically, at the moment, it can be observed that, the public bodies deliver services mainly through wide-open information campaigns on common issues, which means maintaining a certain level of standardisation of the services; while the semi-public and private entities are

increasing their capacities to be more responsive to farmers' needs and provide more targeted services (figure 4).

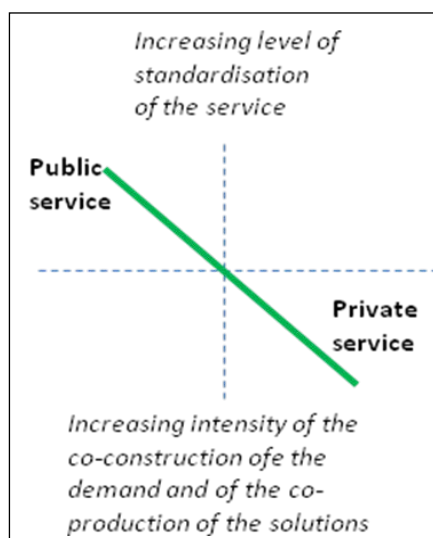


Figure 4. Technical support to farmers and different types of service relationship in Malta

In addition the tools used for providing services vary.

Indeed, the Departments within the MSDEC, provide information through mass media and organise meetings and information seminars for stakeholders, as part of awareness and information campaigns, as well as participation in a number of local television and radio programmes. Although, the use of the telephone, emails and investigations on site are very common. In the case of the NRDN, more participative methods (focus groups) are in use as well as brochures, internet site, manuals and technical documents, and even documentary films both in English and in Maltese languages (see § 4.4.).

Minimum areas of competences to be provided by the FAS in Malta:

- The Statutory Management Requirements and the Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions provided for in Annexes II and III of Council Regulation EC 73/2009.
- Occupational safety standards based on Community legislation.
- Observance by farmers and livestock breeders, of :
 - o General good farming practices
 - o Code of Good Agricultural Practices
 - o Awareness and compliance with all the Directives falling under Cross Compliance
 - o Keep abreast to developments and obligations on current and future CAP payments and Rural Development (Pillar II) measures.
 - o Preparation of supporting documentation required in terms of EAFRD measures, including site plans, waste management plans, nutrient management plans, conservation plans, business plans, plant protection plans, etc.
- Compilation of application forms and, or whole farm management plans of rural development measures as well as assist farmer in proper record keeping.
- Organisation of training courses both to the staff within the FAS and to the clients in all technical areas earlier explained.

With respect to FAS, the Guidelines for the submission of Applications for the Registration of Farm Advisory Service list a number of methods for the provision of advisory services under measure 114 (see box above). Even if, at this moment, there are a wide use of methods such the telephone assistance, one-to-one meetings and visits on farm. Indeed, the study highlighted that there is a very low provision of group and ICT (mobiles, computer) advice services.

With regards to the human resources, the FASC has a total number of 10 part-time officers: 2 technical experts, one related to land and one to health and safety, 3 veterinarian experts, 4 field inspectors and 1 manager. These professionals mostly conduct one to one support to the farmers who are facing off difficulties on observing the EU requirements on cross-compliance. Basically, FAS' services consist of inspections in farms aimed at supporting the entrepreneurs in better understanding the rules, through reporting the findings and providing recommendations on how to overcome the problems they have and not be penalised again in case of new inspection.

The number and qualification of the extension staffs of private providers vary depending on the organisation of the entity and the number and dimension of clients. The number, in general, is between 1 and 5; and in some cases, the provider employs a full-time specialist and subcontracts others, in order to carry out farm visits and provide advice to clients. Similarly, the percentage of extension staff with university or college degrees varies a lot, depending on the entity: some employ only graduates, others encounter personnel with only experience on the field; the number of female staff employed is practically none.

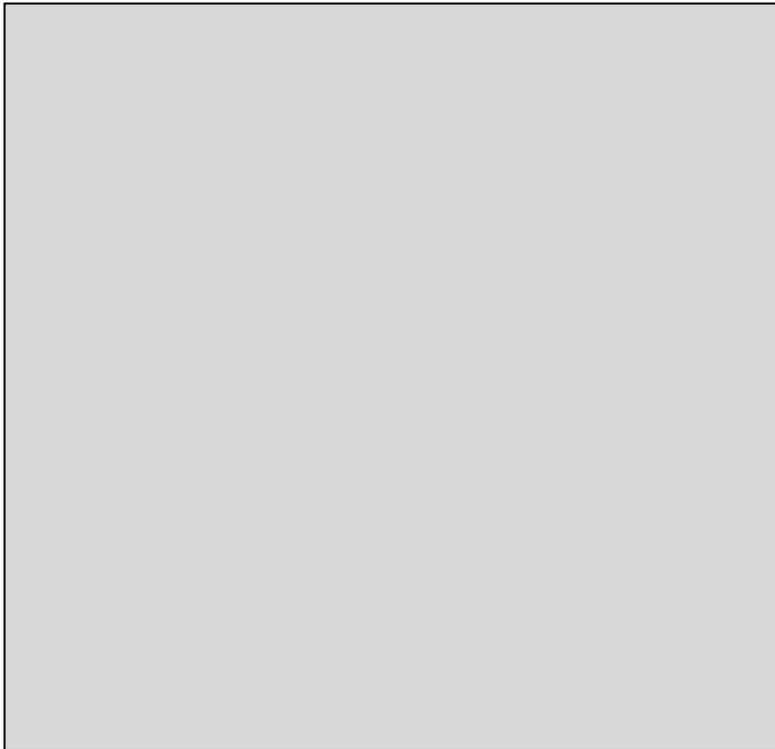
In all cases, the approach for advice provision is one-to-one, often on farm. Off farm groups are also advised mainly through training courses, technical seminars and other events.

4.4 Client and topics/content

The clients and topics of advisory services vary greatly depending on the type of service providers, topics/contents of advice, costs of the service, agricultural sector in which the provider operates.

In this regard this study highlighted that given the previous public free provision of extension services, farmers in Malta are far from willing to pay for the provision of advisory services and the holdings are lacking in both innovation and entrepreneurship. This mainly because of the protectionist economy which characterized Malta until the accession to the EU and of the structural deficits (see § 1) of the agricultural sector which, across the years, brought a very little pressure on farmers to invest in their own human capital as well as on improving the agricultural practices through the help of advisors. Practically, the farmers have only practical experience gathered in the field during their work and very limited formal education (high level of school early-leaving). In such a situation the survey highlighted that Maltese farmers are faced with a near-total lack of information materials in the Maltese language, and since most do not speak or read in English, this leaves them with very restricted access to information, limiting the effectiveness of the mechanisms and dynamics set up in view of transferring knowledge across the supply chains.

During the last few years, and thanks to the work of entities such as the NRDN and the associative bodies, the farmers have increasingly been expressing specific needs for training/advice to support the modernisation and the increase of competitiveness of agro-food sector, as well as for sharing methods and tools such as centralised farm and support premises (see box below). In addition they have focused on young people, through asking for apprenticeship schemes and setting up specific links between farmers and early learners.



Indeed, on the basis of their asking for topics and types of extension and advisory services, the clients can be basically categorised in two categories: the users of the formal FAS and other clients, who are mainly represented by the members of associative bodies and the beneficiaries of RDP measures on capital investments and innovation.

The first are the ones incurred or being incurred in penalties regarding the non-compliance with European and national GAEC and SMR requirements. They are intercepted by the FASC

through its collaboration with the Control Unit of Paying Agency (see also § 5.1). Besides, the beneficiaries of the measure 114 of the RDP belong to this category.

In the case of the members of cooperatives and PO/PGs, the groups addressed and the number of clients vary depending on the sector and dimension of the holdings, through covering all categories of farmers. Also the contents of advice vary from the basic/institutional services, such as the support for selling the products, to the support for implementing innovations in farm and for the connection with international entities, in view of sharing practices and knowledge which are not available in the island. While, the main target groups of private advisory companies are represented by the few of large-medium-small commercial farms who can afford paying for such services. In these cases, the topics covered are highly variable ranging from cross-compliance, renewable energies, waste and water management, rural development and economic efficiency.

4.5 Linkages with other AKIS actors

The research emphasised the low level of knowledge flows and operational synergies between the advisory service organisations, the other actors of the agricultural knowledge system and particularly with the farmers. However, since the (currently on-going) reform of the FAS and the entry of new subjects supposedly playing a role in the knowledge transfer sphere (see § 2.1.), the farm advice domain has been characterised by a certain dynamism, which mostly concerns the informal linkages. By looking to these latter linkages, it should be noted that, still, the MSDEC is the *deus ex machina* of the AKIS approach, even if the varied extent of the pro-activeness of some warrants further analysis. This is particularly the case for the cooperatives and the producers organisations, which are gaining a base through applying to the measures targeted to enhance the human capital (111, 114 and 115), the cooperation between farmers (measure 124 and 142) for innovation, and the modernisation of holdings and improving quality of productions/processing (121 and 123). This particular pro-activeness of associative organisations

is also testified by some collaboration run by the Organizazzjoni Produtturi Gheneb għall-Inbid Malta, co-financed under measure 142, with the University of Malta and the Ministry for Resources and Rural Affairs, even outside the RDP framework (OP Italia–Malta 2007-2013).

In this arena, the researchers and the advisory services seem to take part in a minor role. Indeed, they are contractualised by cooperatives and POs. This highlighted a more individualistic approach leading to weak linkages, shaped by discontinuity and personal relations, rather than building up bridges between the research and the advisory worlds. Although, in a few cases the associative bodies conduct in-house research, thanks to the co-funding of the Ministry (i.e. KIM).

Still, on the cooperatives and POs, there is a call for some remarks. First it should be noted that, due to the representativeness of the farmers, they have a potential in promoting and assisting the circulation of knowledge and the implementation of innovation at farm level, through ensuring a worthy critical mass. This, in principle fosters innovation across the agro-food supply chains though leading to a true development of their competitiveness of the supply chains. In addition it must be said that they provide the service only to members, through limiting the scope of the innovations applied at farm level.

Secondly, it can be observed that some of them put on an integrated use of the RDP measures, which ensures global support to the farmers through facilitating their access to the EU funds as well as the knowledge flows among them. On this point, the interesting issue is the type of knowledge flows which they can foster across the supply chains. In fact, within the cooperatives/producers organisations the farmers', beyond being the final beneficiaries, are empowered to decide what and how to benefit from the training and advisory services, through developing a major attitude to collaborate each other and run emulative behaviours, by spreading a circular-type knowledge and information flow. This happened in the cases of KPH, which supported the farmers in the implementation of new and environmentally friendly agricultural practices through training courses (111), testing the innovation (124) and supporting its effective application by advisory services at farm level. Similarly, this was also the case for the Maltese dairy producers' organisation, which provided artificial insemination and cattle breeding services to the livestock breeders' within a project aimed at quality improvements and improved cow genetics, by implementing measures 124 and 111.

These cases highlighted that the associative bodies are likely to target the farmers' specific needs better through tailoring the front office activities in relation to their respective investments. At the same time, these organisations demonstrate a certain capacity to provide reliable and adequate advisory services as well as scientific support. This is possible thanks to, on the one hand, the out-sourcing of technical expertise, which belongs mostly to the private advisory companies, and on the other hand, to the government's facilities, which, for example, still provide veterinary laboratories services and research back-stopping. Indeed, although the University of Malta and the MCAST are not formally involved into the innovation projects run by the cooperatives/POs under measure 124, the Department of rural affairs is ensuring that the first companies provide consistent back-office activities to the second group of companies. However, for the FAS, according to the guidelines for the applications to measures 114 and 115, its experts shall attend specialised training courses, approved by the Ministry responsible for

agriculture, on cross compliance obligations. Truly, the research highlighted that a lot of informal individual relations shape the research and advisory interactions, mostly due to cross-management between the Institutes/Associative bodies/FAS. Moreover, in the recent times, due to the lack of some facilities and expertise in Malta (i.e. veterinary), the FAS and the associative organisations (KIM) run a kind of cooperation at the international level, both in terms of back-office activities (training and advisory) and teamwork.

Finally, the only formal linkages that could be observed between the advisory services and the research world are the ones led by the Ministry of rural affairs through the Paying Agency which is responsible for running the Farm Advisory Service Registration Board (FASRB) (see figure 5). Here, although the Board just carries out administrative activities regarding the selection of the advisory organisations and the follow-up of their activities, it should take into account that the FAS Consortium belongs to the Ministry, which controls the University of Malta and the MCAST, as well as two cooperatives (KIM and KPH). In this context, the formal linkages are likely to facilitate an effective knowledge flow among the actors.

4.6 Programming and planning of advisory work

With regards to the formal FAS, the programming and planning of the advisory work in Malta is pre-defined by the national regulation applied to the matter. In fact, since it was under selection for the access to the measure 115 of the RDP, the FAS Consortium has a specific work plan which details the types of services to provide, the topics and the number of individual farmer to manage per year (see § 4.2 and table 4). Unless still not applied to the provision of FAS to the beneficiaries of the measure 114, this approach is likely to standardise the services that are to be provided.

However, the majority of the private companies also provide technical advice on the basis of a proper work plan, but this is elaborated case by case and in collaboration with the clients. On the other hand, in the cases of associative bodies, there is no evidence of the use of a work plan and the provision of services is done upon specific request.

In any case, all the types of advisory providers keep records of the advisors work, through specific reports on the activities conducted and their results.

5. Characteristics of Farm Advisory System

5.1 Organisations forming FAS

Like most of the MS (ADE, 2009), the advisory services in Malta are organised according to a publicly-driven approach, which, since 2009, promoted the involvement of private operators in the delivery of extension and/or advisory services, through maintaining the overall guidance and coordination role of the MSDEC.

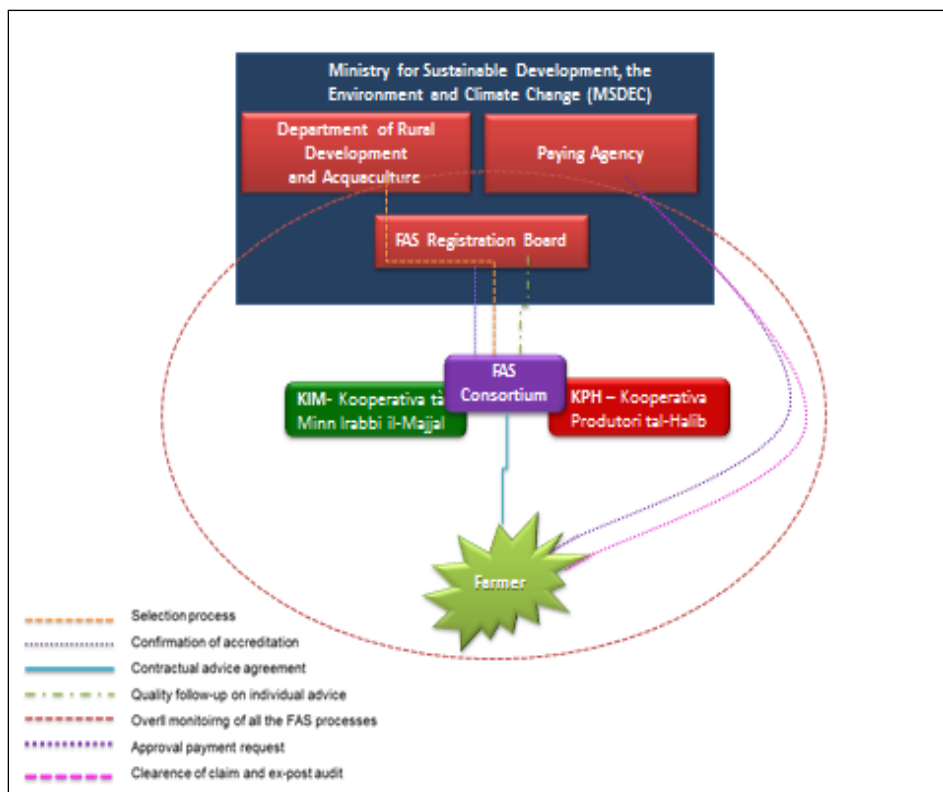


Figure 5. Maltese FAS implementation model

In this context, there is no evidence that a proper farmers needs assessments on the extension or advisory services was carried out. Certainly it is documented that, the shift to a de-concentrated model of the FAS has also taken into account the farmers' need for better training and extension services, which arose during the stakeholder consultations for the ex post evaluation process (RDP 2004-2006) and the design process of the RDP 2007-2013.

Particularly, following the de-concentration of the extension services, the FAS in Malta was set up just in 2011, when, after 2 years⁶, the public call for applications issued by the FARB has been finalized through the selection of the only FASC. Thus, at the moment, the latter is the only one formally entitled to provide farm advisory services targeting the farmers applying for the CAP measures. Decisions on applications for registration are taken by the FASRB, which is

⁶ The first call was opened on 20th February 2009 but no one entity obtained the minim score. The second call was opened two years later and closed on 24th May 2011.

composed of five members who are representatives from the Ministry responsible for agriculture, including a representative from the Paying Agency who is responsible for the register of the FAS. The framework is quite comprehensive and sets out rules on the administrative, organisational, professional requirements, approaches and methods, which the FAS bodies should comply to (see § 4.2).

In the very near future there is a plan for providing services for soil testing and fertilizer plans, because they are obligatory, and a training course on keeping updating the farm books and another on agricultural practices, particularly addressing the dairy producers.

Given the purposes explained above, the provider does not have a specific target of farmers at the moment, serving both small dairy farms and big land owners.

By the time of the research, almost 90 farmers have paid a registration fee but only 50% have also paid the service fee. These costs, together with the lack of awareness on the usefulness of the FAS, do not contribute to creating a demand for services, as the physical and financial performance for measure 114 shows.

5.2 Evaluation of implementation of FAS

The implementation of the FAS is certainly affected by the post-accession reform which interested the policy schemes of the AKIS. This latter point, as highlighted in the previous chapters, is essentially based on the FAS as implemented by the RDP measures 114 and 115, for which assessment is, therefore, a fundamental standpoint for its evaluation. However, in the specific case of Malta, as sometimes in other MSs, the advisory services are available to farmers outside the FAS and through vocational training supported under measure 111.

In this regard, it should be noted that, due to the very short time of real implementation of the measures, it is not possible to assess their effects. In fact, the figures indicate a low level of physical and financial performance for measure 115, while measure 114 is still not implemented at all (table 6). However, the analysis could deepen the policy issues, the delivery system arranged by the MA of the RDP and the perceptions of the relevant stakeholders.

Table 6. Performance levels for measures 114 and 115

Measure	Description	Output	Value	Targets 2007-2013
111	Vocational training and information actions	Number of participants in training	8532	2500
		Number of training days received	4181	3100
114	Use of advisory services	Number of farmers supported	0	1000
115	Setting up of management, relief and advisory services	Number of newly set up of management, relief or advisory services	1	6

Source: European Rural Development Network

Nevertheless, measure 111 is performing well. In fact, its implementation is exceeding the government's expectations, by surpassing the whole programming period targets (+120%) and reaching an expenditure level of about 45%. The main reason is explained by the fact that most of the beneficiaries (12) are represented by producers' associative bodies (cooperatives and associations) which involved their members as participants.

Therefore, on the basis of the actual data, it can be affirmed that the measure and the delivery system applied by the Government seem to fit farmers' needs, without registering any particular problem, in terms of selection procedures, timing of the calls and matters of training courses. Clearly the MA, by the time of the submission of the RDP at the CE, had underestimated the physical outputs. Particularly, the promotion of the integrated use of the measure with the ones supporting the investments in capital assets (measures 121 and 123), is worthwhile in fostering a major number of applications and ensures a major consistency of the investments.

As beneficiaries of the measure, the cooperatives and the POs are playing a crucial role in attracting farmers, by boosting the participation of their members to the training courses, and in providing services which are better targeted to the needs of different agricultural sectors of Malta (wine grapes, tomatoes for processing, fruit and vegetables and diary). Besides, the farmers are demonstrating a certain attitude to attend the training courses and, according to the recent consultation process for the RDP 2014-2020, they are developing an increasing demand for innovative themes and methods. This, considering that the measure budget is still to be 55% committed, should be addressed in the further calls for applications to measure. The information on the other beneficiaries of the measure confirms the absence of the University/other Research and formal training bodies in the RDP implementation, as well as the long-lasting decisive role of the agriculture directorate, which is one of the beneficiaries, in providing such services.

The implementation of the measures 114 and 115 confirm the weaknesses of the agricultural advisory and extension services. Indeed, the whole advisory system is still away from the agricultural scenario and the private companies hardly have a self-acknowledgement on their role and functions in transferring knowledge and facilitating innovation across the primary sector. In addition the delivery system is affected by an excessive bureaucracy which, together with the administrative costs and the selection criteria, is off-putting the access to the FAS and keeping such services restricted to a few experts, through hampering the increase of skills and capabilities on the matter. In addition, the advisory services are unlikely to be demanded, in principle, and then are viewed as unattractive by the Maltese farmers who are not yet accustomed to paying for them (Adi Ltd, 2010). Thus, to a certain extent, these measures failed in helping to establish the private FAS, through ensuring adequate organisational and professional arrangements as well as the quality of the services. Moreover, the contribution to the use of the FAS had to facilitate developing a major acknowledgement on advisory services for the purpose of increasing the competitiveness of the sector and building of farmers' trustiness in the new AKIS actors. Looking more in depth, the delivery system of the measures 114 and 115, which are intended to be implemented in conjunction with one another, is inconsistent with the policy objectives and mostly did not succeed in relation to the bad timing of the calls (delays and lack of synchronization), the complexity (bureaucratic difficulties), the lack of transparency

(appeals against the application of the selection criteria) in the selection procedures, the limitation on the eligible beneficiaries (cooperatives were excluded), costs of setting up the FAS' and the use and low level of contribution (20% of the consultancy cost is required).

Apart from this, it must take into account that, in line with the evaluation of FAS implementation conducted at the EC level (ADE s.a., 2009), these measures had a bad performance all over Europe and the reasons mostly belong to the restrictions on the themes of advice, which, in relation to the eligible maximum amount of contributions, made the measures unappealing and the fear of farmers to be appointed by controls/penalties in case of not meeting the performance requirements (GAEC and SMR). Indeed, according to the interviews, the latter issue is certainly a deterrent for farmers, due to the strong connection between the FAS Consortium and the Paying agency in charge of the control checks. This occurrence does not neglect the evident, and longstanding, reluctance of the farmers to pay for the use of the FAS, and is very particular and has certainly been caused by the longstanding public provision extension services for free.

Eventually, the recent stakeholder' consultations emphasise a certain evolving awareness on the opportunity to use the farm advisory services for increasing the farms competitiveness as well as a major acknowledgment in the demand for new services and matters correlated to the farm's practices and to new matters of rural development, such as climate change, innovation and food quality and security (Maltese National Rural Network, 2013).

6. Summary and Conclusions

6.1 Key concerns of the current AKIS, trends, knowledge needs especially with regards to the new CAP

Malta is still undergoing the transition from a protectionist economy, which had isolated the agricultural sector from the rest of the world, towards the EU/international competitive economy.

This is challenging especially for a small island that, apart from the geographical limitations, is characterised by structural deficits and law/tradition constraints, such as: the fragmentation; the smallness of the farms (average size of the holdings is 1,6 ha and the 79% of the holdings stay on 5 to 9 LSU); the high levels of illiteracy and ageing of farmers; the high land prices for agricultural land and inheritance practices which dictate that farmland be divided between offspring through limiting new farming entrants. Moreover, two thirds of the agricultural land in the Maltese Islands is owned by the State, 76% of the agricultural land area cultivated is rented, with only 24% being owner occupied.

Since 2004, the AKIS in Malta is undergoing a phase of changeover from a de-concentration type, where the National level provided the services through its own departments, to a co-management type, where the Ministry participated in the management of the advisory system together with the professionals (FAS Consortium) and the farmers (cooperatives and POs).

In this context, the key concerns for the AKIS are the followings:

- a) the lack of a proper national strategy on research and innovation in agriculture or at least an action plan. On this point, even the National Rural Development Strategy for the programming period 2007-2013 does not refer to the research and the innovation; while the “National Research and Innovation strategy 2020”, refers to the opportunity for promoting the value added and innovation in agriculture and rural development just by addressing the RDP 2014-2020 for the actions to be implemented. This is bringing together a few pieces of, mostly public, unconnected research funded by international programmes (i.e. FP7) and without any real usability/application at farm level;
- b) the lack of a systemic vision of the AKIS’ actors. Indeed, the co-management approach seems to be more oriented to fix “what has to be delivered to whom” rather than to set the stage for recognising the actors and providing a reorganisation of their roles, functions and relations, thus bringing together a resilient fragmentation of the AKIS into very few providers and duties. In this regard, there is a need for a major recognition of the role of the system as a whole in increasing the competitiveness in agriculture, by spreading innovative thinking amongst the farmers and enabling responsive entrepreneurs. Indeed, on the other hand, the research also highlighted a scarce self-acknowledgement of the researchers, of the private consultants and of the trainers, on their specific roles as part of the agricultural and innovation system, within which they should cooperate and dialogue in view of implementing more targeted (useful and usable) research and innovations. On this point, certainly, there is a call for promoting the enhancement of the skills and competencies of the actual actors, the entrance of new subjects, a wide awareness on the

AKIS actors among the farmers, bridging the actors and fostering their cooperation for innovation;

- c) the only focus is on cross compliance (FAS) and not on innovation. Indeed, the advisory system designed by the MSDEC is still linked to compliance and does not offer a service aimed towards knowledge transfer and innovation and to enhance general farm management, which are the most important needs to be addressed in view of increasing the competitiveness of agriculture and fostering environmental and social sustainability;
- d) the reluctance of farmers to ask and pay for extension services. Farmers have always had a scarce entrepreneurial attitude to innovation and competitiveness, just being interested in selling their products at the best price, without any attempt to meliorate their quality or reduce their environmental impacts, or to address the consumers' expectations. This market-orientation has been maintained throughout the accession to the EU, although it has translated into an emerging willingness for increasing the marketability of the products and the productivity, just through demanding for marketing services and suppliers. This attitude, even if it is bridging the farmers to the extension services, is far from a major acknowledgement on the need for investments in human capital and entrepreneurship. Indeed, this is true especially when they act within cooperatives and the producer organisations, where they are still endorsing their own individualistic attitudes, without any attempt to promote a collaborative and unitary work for tracking common pathways of innovation of the value chains. Nevertheless, the associative bodies are playing a crucial role in linking the advisors to the farmers and these efforts should be better organised and enlarged to the researchers. Truly, in the actual context, the associative bodies seem likely to play the role of innovation brokers, once they reinforce their management skills, in view of reaching more acknowledgment on their potentials and getting to a more systemic view of the AKIS.

In this situation, the renewed CAP of which a major priority is the transfer of knowledge across the farmers, based on the enhancement of the capacities and skills of both the farmers and trainers/advisors, is quite challenging and offers a number of opportunities to overtake the actual concerns of the AKIS in Malta. This demands first the settlement of a national innovation strategy which should provide a reconstruction of the AKIS based on the concept of interactive innovation, as well as the assumption of the mutual recognition and dialogue of its actors, and the existence of linkages which shape collaborative behaviours, through introducing “innovation to firm”. The responsible body at the Member-State level is called to the difficult task of coordinating a new AKIS approach in order to allow the achievement of cross-linkages among functions and themes, farmers' accessibility, stakeholders networking, as well as the enlargement of farm advisory services beyond the scope of advice on provisions concerning cross-compliance obligations into an instrument of sustainable development and innovation of farms.

6.2 Key characteristics of the advisory services and the FAS, deficits, gaps, strengths

In Malta, the provision of advisory services is characterised by quite a clear separation between standardised services and client-targeted services, which are run by three major types of

suppliers: public, semi-public and private bodies (table 7). The first are mainly represented by the farm advisory services, except for some information and advisory services that are offered directly by the MSDEC that are shaped by the EU regulations on cross compliance, by only including the advice addressing the GAEC and SMR requirements. Even if standardised, their delivery is tailored to farmers needs through a variety of methods and tools applied by the advisors. They are meant to be delivered only by the FAS Consortium, a semi-public body which has been officially recognised by the MSDEC, involving 2 producer cooperatives (milk and pigs) and the MSDEC, as partners, and 10 part-time officers, as advisors. In principle, these types of services also include the farmers’ support for the applications to the RDP and the delivery of training courses, still related to cross compliance. They rely on a very prescriptive (top-down approach) national and European regulatory framework, through being totally financed by the RDP (measures 114 and 115).

Certainly by looking at the data and to the interviews the marketization of the FAS appears to be failing both for the policy design and the delivery system applied for its implementation. In effect, these services are quite unattractive, due to the costly and complex access to the public contribution, the lack of transparency in the selection procedures, the link to the penalties for not being complaints to the EU requirements and the low public contribution towards the use of the services. Besides, the implementation of the FAS is very recent and the initial performances are far from the targets.

The other types of services are meant to be tailored to the farmer’s needs and are carried out by private advisory firms, farmers’ cooperatives, POs and NGOs. These are mostly designed and programmed in cooperation with the advisors and the clients and out of any national and European regulation framework. Consequently the themes, methods and tools vary along with a certain extent of diversity of services providers, clients and funding schemes.

Table 7. FAS in Malta – main characteristic

Features of the FAS		Delivery		
		Public	Semi-public	Private
Funding	Public	National Budget	Meas. 111, 114, 115 RDP	Meas. 111, 114, 115, 124, 142 RDP, Contracts with national state
	Private	No evidence	Registration fee 35€	Fee for extension service Membership fee (cooperatives/PO), CCF
Human resources		MSDEC civil servants	Field inspectors: high degree and experience focusing on Cross compliance; Other officers: degree related on Environment, Public, animal and Plant Health, Animal welfare, GAEC, Health and Safety.	Full-time specialists/subcontracted specialists; extension staff with university or college degree/field experience; no female staff

Methods	Mass media; telephone/email services	One to one support; mock farm inspections; telephone support service; small group advice on specific topics; awareness raising events/seminars; internet based tools	One-to-one support; off farm groups implemented through training courses, technical seminars and other events.
Clients	All farmers and wide public	Farmers who have penalties with the Control Unit of Paying Agency Farmers beneficiaries in being under the RDP measure 114	Paying farmers; members of cooperatives and PO's
Topics/contents	General topics (mainly health and safety issues) and phytosanitary issues.	Cross-compliance	Farm management, cross-compliance, renewable energies, rural development, economic efficiency, productive techniques, problem solving advice, etc.
Linkages	Formal linkages between the all actors	Formal linkages between Ministry, KPH, KIM	Extremely variables depending on actors
Programming and planning	No evidence	Work plan based (5 years)	Long-term technical advice: work plan based; Short-term services to cooperatives/POs members: On demand

Overall, a general assessment, in terms of the deficits and gaps of the advisory services' arrangements provided by Malta's government could be synthesized in the following way.

The advisory system as a whole still needs to close the gap created by the farmers' expectations in terms of themes and methods which should better fit their needs of increasing the competitiveness, in line with the EU policy for sustainable growth and rural development.

The limited interest of private advisors accessing the EARDF through measures beyond setting up FAS shows their limits in self-acknowledging their role in supporting the global management of farmers. Truly, they risk being set apart from bookkeeping, accountability and taxes services and other actors who appear more pro-active (namely the cooperatives).

The advisors, the researchers and the trainers appear to be linked to each other to a very little extent, and the farmers are hardly involved in the circulation of knowledge across the value chains. This lack of integration leads the services providers to stay in their own activity, which is widely characterised by weak linkages and personal relations through which back-off activities are carried out.

The lack of a systemic approach to the AKIS is reflected in the design and the implementation of RDP's measures, which should be better integrated through correlating the use of farm advisory and training services with the farmers' investments in material assets.

Moreover, a few points can be made in terms of strengths:

- The cooperatives and the producers' organisations are a strength of the value chains and have potential in fostering knowledge exchange and implementation of innovation at the farm level, as well as due to their historical representativeness of the farmers. They are likely to play a crucial role in developing a major acknowledgement of the utility of advisory services, through their involvement in advisory mechanisms, as well as brokering relevant actors around innovation projects.
- The stakeholders show a certain evolving awareness on the opportunity to use the farm advisory services to increase the farms competitiveness as well as a major acknowledgment in demanding new services and matters correlated to the farms practices and to new themes of the rural development, such as climate change, innovation and food quality and security.

In conclusion, it would be interesting to record the pro-activeness of some actors (cooperatives, POs, NGOs) and some experiences, such as the collaboration run by the Organizazzjoni Produtturi Gheneb għall-Inbid Malta with the University of Malta and the Ministry for Resources and Rural Affairs, even outside of the RDP framework and the coordinating activities carried out by KPH which aimed at spreading a circular-type knowledge and information flow (§ 4.5).

7. Methodological reflections and acknowledgements

The study is largely the result of an enquiry carried out by employing direct interviews. The availability of pre-existing data on AKIS in Malta, both in literature and on the web, is in fact highly limited and insufficient and would lead to a fragmented and out-dated reconstruction of the actors and the relationships that compose the AKIS. In fact, the information reported on the website of the Standing Committee on Agricultural Research (SCAR) – http://ec.europa.eu/research/agriculture/scar/mt_en.htm – are not up-to-date because of a recent re-organisation of the internal structure of both the Ministry responsible for Agriculture and the University of Malta. The FAS evaluation report from 2009 (http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/eval/reports/fas/report_des_en.pdf), on the other hand, basically does not account for any information on the FAS in Malta. This is mostly due to the fact that Malta joined the European Union only recently, in 2004, and FAS was set-up in the last two years.

Nonetheless, the desk-based research identified some relevant actors to send the questionnaire to (table 9). Unfortunately the initial responses were almost zero, probably due to the holiday period during which it was initially sent, and about a month later the questionnaire was sent again to the same subjects for a further request for cooperation. Additionally, some of them were asked, in advance, to highlight their availability to cooperate in further elaborations to be carried out in person, both via individual interviews and through focus groups.

In addition, direct contact was established with some subjects with the aim of assessing their interest in the theme and to stimulate the fill out of the questionnaire. Even this second attempt did not succeed. In light of the short time left to finalise the research we opted for the use of interviews through telephone or via skype, literally ‘hunting’ the stakeholders.

In the end, seven interviews were realised (table 8), through which it was possible to fix a fairly accurate and updated description of the AKIS in Malta. In fact, given the very early stage of implementation of the FAS and of the entire AKIS as well, the interviews can be considered as sufficiently representative of the different entities which play a role in the actual AKIS of Malta.

Unfortunately, despite our best efforts and the continued requests for collaboration only two (out of 8) were completed. This does not show enough data from a quantitative point of view.

On the whole, we did not find a cooperative climate, except for some subjects, probably due to the fact that we were not from Malta. Nevertheless, it should be noted that in some cases those addressed were more cooperative by e-mail, which is another source of important information. Despite these difficulties, the study provides a wealth of information that, given the lack of much national and international specific literature, will surely be useful for the purpose of creating a base of knowledge about AKIS in Malta.

Table 8. Interviewed persons

Name	Name of organisation
Zona Ivanovic	FAS Consortium
George Philippe Attard	Department of rural sciences and food systems – Institute of earth systems, University of Malta

Sharlo Camilleri	Paying Agency
Anthony Meli	APS Consult Ltd
Oliver Frendo	Pig Breeders' Cooperative Society Ltd. (KIM)
KPH management	Milk Producers Co-operative Ltd. (KPH).
Rolan Micallef Attard	Farm Advisory Services Co-op Limited

Table 9. Organisations addressed by questionnaire

Name of organisation	Address /e-mail	Questionnaire	
		sent	get back
FAS Consortium	zona.ivanovic@fasconsortium.eu	yes	no *
APS Consult	anthony.meli@apsconsult.com.mt	yes	yes
FAS Co-op	info@farmadvisoryservices.com	yes	no
Koperattiva Produtturi tal-Halib Ltd (KPH)	info@kph.com.mt ; gbuttigieg20@gmail.com	yes	no
Koperattiva ta Min Irabbi l-Majjal Ltd. (KIM)	info@kim.coop	no	no *
MOAM - Malta Organic Agriculture Movement	info@moam.org.mt	yes	no
Assoċjazzjoni tal- Bdiewa (ATB)	atb@maltanet.net	yes	no
Ghaqda tal-produtturi gozitano coop	info@keen-advertising.com	yes	no
Organizzazioni Produttori Gheneb Ghall-Inbid Malta	info@vitimalta.org	yes	yes

* Part of the information contained in the questionnaire were obtained through the interview

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9. Appendices

9.1. List and contact of organisations forming AKIS

Name of organisation (in English)	Address	Website	Status (public/R&E/ private/FBO/ NGO)*
Ministry for Sustainable Development, the Environment and Climate change (MSDEC)*	Casa Leoni, 476 St Joseph High Road, Santa Venera SVR 1012	http://msdec.gov.mt/en/Pages/mdsec%20main.aspx	Public
Paying Agency		https://secure2.gov.mt/MRRA-PA/ss?l=1	Public
Directorate of Agriculture		http://agric.gov.mt/un_con?l=1	Public
Plant Health Directorate		http://agric.gov.mt/plant-health-dept-profile?l=1	Public
National Rural Network		https://secure2.gov.mt/MRRA-MA/national-rural-network?l=1	Public
National Veterinary Laboratory		http://vafd.gov.mt/food-health-and-diagnostics-lab?l=1	Public
Malta Aquaculture Research Centre		http://vafd.gov.mt/malagri_rescen?l=1	Public
University of Malta** - Institute of Earth Systems	Msida MSD 2080	http://www.um.edu.mt	Public
Malta and the College for Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) – Institute of Agribusiness	MCAST Main Campus Corradino Hill Paola PLA 9032.	http://www.mcast.edu.mt/	Public
FAS Consortium	P.O. Box 61, Marsa Office: Agriculture Research and Development Centre, Ghammieri	https://secure2.gov.mt/MRRA-PA/fas?l=1	Public-private partnership
APS Consult	APS House, 20, St. Anne Square, Floriana FRN9020 Malta	http://www.apsbank.com.mt/en/aps-consult	Private
FAS Co-op	Me'a Ghemieri, L/O Rabat RBT 4112		Private
Milk Producers Cooperative (Koperattiva Produtturi tal-Halib) Ltd. - KPH	A38, KPH Feedmill Qasam Industrijali Marsa MRS 9081		Private
Pork Breeders Cooperative Pork (Koperattiva ta Min Irabbi I-Majjal) Ltd. - KIM	5A Xatt Il-Qwabar, Marsa, HMR 17, MALTA	http://www.kim.coop/	Private
MOAM - Malta Organic Agriculture Movement	34 Gulju Cauchi Street Balzan - BZN 1131 Malta	http://www.moam.org.mt/	NGO

The Biological Conservation Research Foundation (BICREF)	PO BOX 30 Hamrun Malta	http://www.bicref.org/bicref/	NGO
Farmers Association ATB (Assoċjazzjoni tal-Bdiewa)		http://www.maltafarmers.eu/info_atb.html	NGO
Malta Viticulture Producers Organisation (Organizzazzjoni Produtturi Gheneb Ghall-Inbid) Malta	Buskett Winery, Triq L-Imnarja, Buskett, Malta.	http://www.vitimalta.org/	Private
Tomato producers cooperative (Koperattiva Produtturi tat-Tadam ta' Malta Ltd -	Sterlizia, Triq il-Kbira, Haz-Zebbug		Private
Outlook Cooperative	Triq l-Iskultur, QRM 3580, Hal Qormi, Malta	www.outlook.com	Private
Gozitano Gozo Agricultural Cooperative (Koperattiva Ghawdxija Agrikola Gozitano) Ltd	Triq l-Imgarr, Xewkija VCT111		Private
Association of Producers / Agricultural Cooperative Gozo (Ghaqda tal Produtturi/Koperattiva Agrikola Ghawdxija) - Gozitano Ltd	Triq l-Imgarr, Xewkija VCT111		Private
Gozitano producers organization			Private
Malta Dairy Products Ltd	Triq Mile End, Hamrun HMR - 1712	http://www.maltadairyproducts.com/	Private
Tomato Producers Society Gozo (Ghaqda Ghawdxija Produtturi tat-Tadam)			Private

* Due to a recent reorganisation of the Ministry responsible for Agriculture, it is not possible to identify exactly the number of Departments, Division and Centres involved in research/extension and advisory activities, as the new organogram is not available. It is not clear how the previous branches (agriculture, veterinary, fisheries) and their functions are currently organised within the Ministry for Sustainable Development, the Environment and Climate change (MSDEC). For completeness of information see the last organisation charts of Agriculture Directorate and Plant Health Directorate, as well as the previous organisation of the Ministry (below).

The SCAR website http://ec.europa.eu/research/agriculture/scar/mt_en.htm reports the following structure within the Ministry for Rural Affairs and the Environment:

- Agriculture Services and Rural Development
- Agricultural Services Laboratories
 - Animal Husbandry
 - Fruit Trees and Crop Husbandry
 - Viticulture and Oenology Unit
 - Plant Health
 - Fruticulture
 - Plant Pathology and Nematology
 - Rural Development Department

- Food and Veterinary Regulations Division
- Fisheries Conservation and Control Division
- Malta Environment and Planning Authority

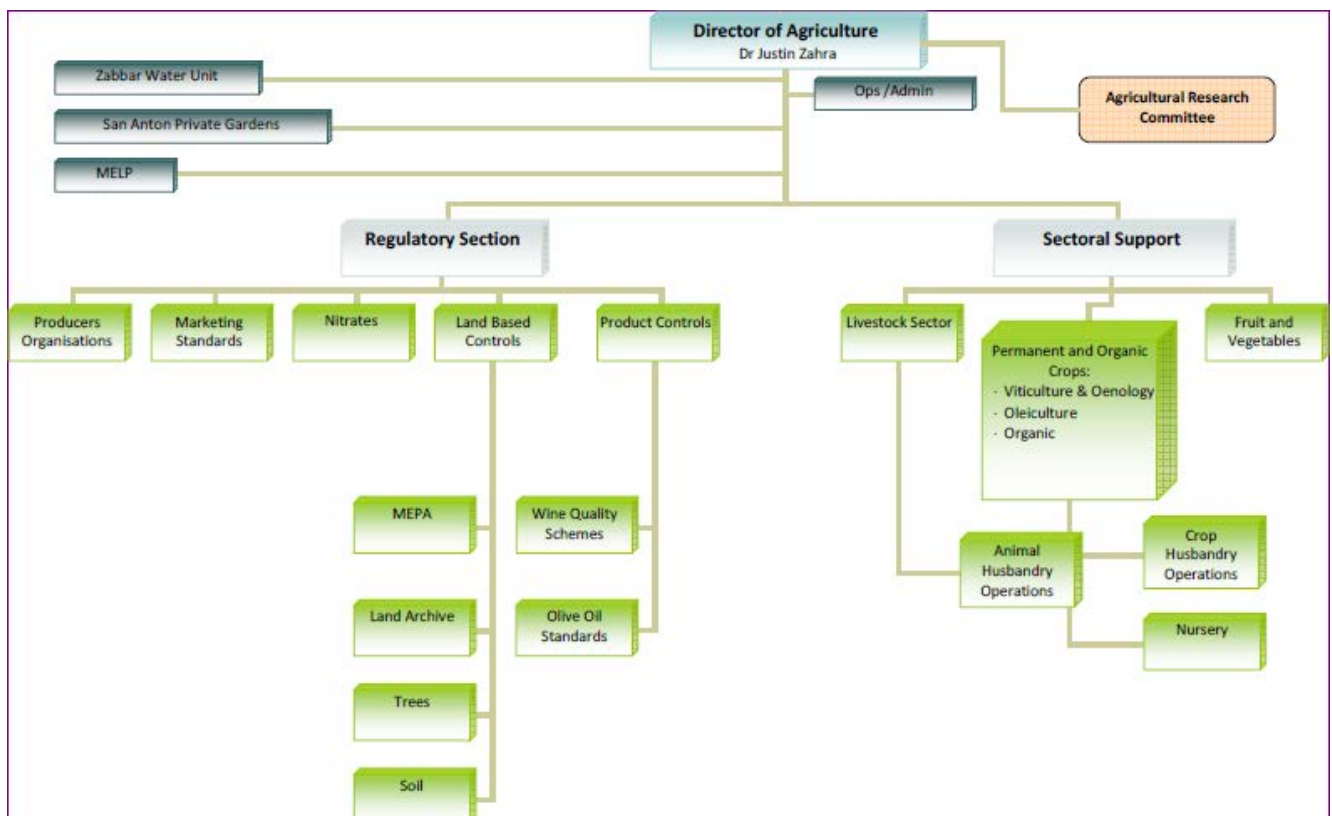
The report of the project “EU AGRI MAPPING” financed under the 6th framework programme (*Agri-Food Research in Europe: country reports*) of 2007 mentions the following entities:

- National Agriculture and Research Centre (Department of Agriculture within the Rural Affairs and the Paying Agency Division)
- Malta Centre for Fisheries Sciences (Fisheries and Aquaculture Branch within the Veterinary Affairs and Fisheries Division)
- Department of Food Health and Diagnostics(Under validation) within the Veterinary Affairs Branch

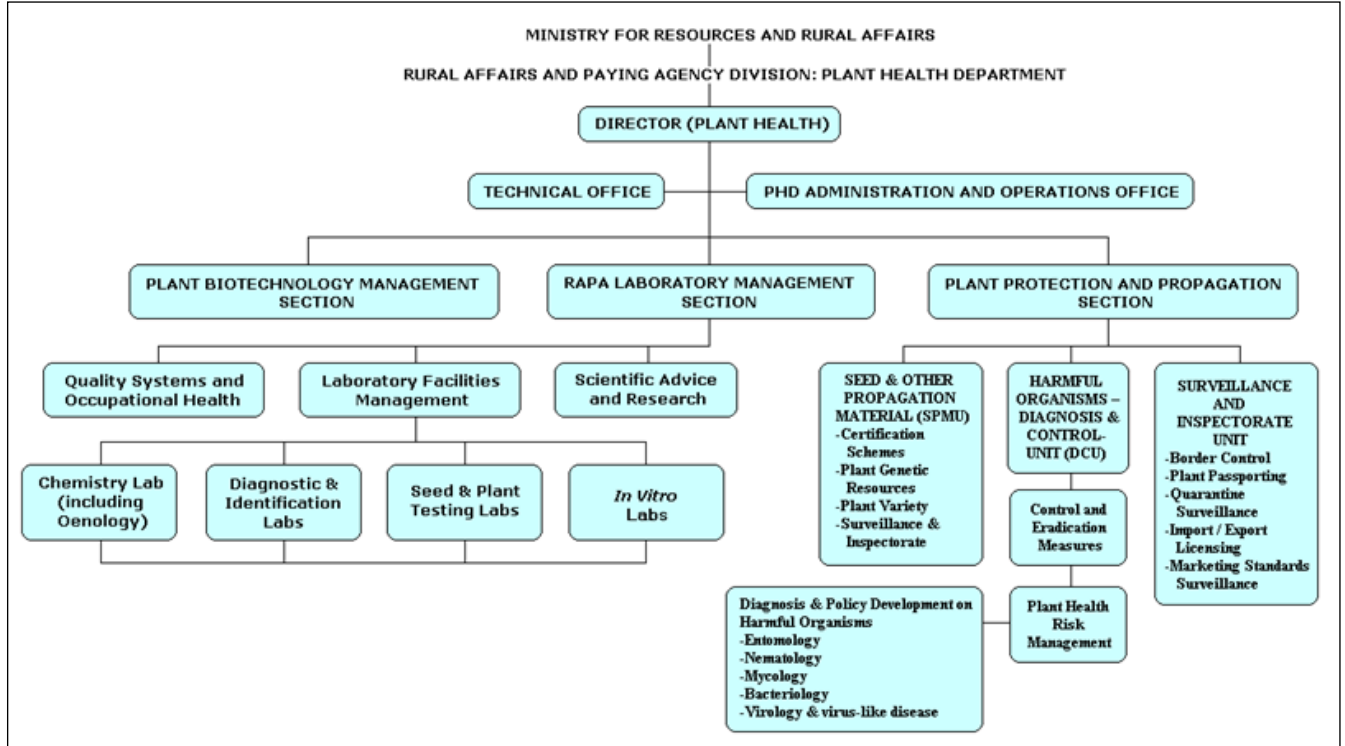
** Due to a recent reorganisation of the Institutes and Departments, that took place in July 2013, it is not possible to identify exactly the number of Institutes, Departments, Division and Research Unit involved in research related to agriculture/ rural development/ environment issues. In particular, the Institute of Earth Systems (IES) was established, merging the former International Environment Institute (IEI) and the Institute of Agriculture (IoA) into a single entity. The Institute includes within it two divisions, the Division of Environmental Management and Planning and the Division of Rural Sciences and Food Systems. The Institute also includes within it the Euro-Mediterranean Centre on Insular Coastal Dynamics (ICoD).

The report of the project “EU AGRI MAPPING” (*Agri-Food Research in Europe: country reports*) related that, in 2007, at least 5 subjects – Agriculture Research Unit (Institute of Agriculture), Research Laboratory of Pharmacology (Department of Pharmacology and Therapeutics), Argotti Herbarium and Botanical Gardens (Faculty of Science), Environmental Health Division (Institute of Health Care), Department of Anatomy (Faculty of Medicine and Surgery) – were involved in agri-food research.

Actual organization charts of Agriculture Directorate



Old organization charts of Plant Health Directorate



Organization charts of the previous Ministry for Resources and Rural Affairs (now MSDEC)

