



European Thematic Network for interactive and innovative knowledge exchange on sheep health and nutrition

Policy Brief

‘Assessing multi-actor approach post Covid19’

02/06/2023



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement N° 863056.

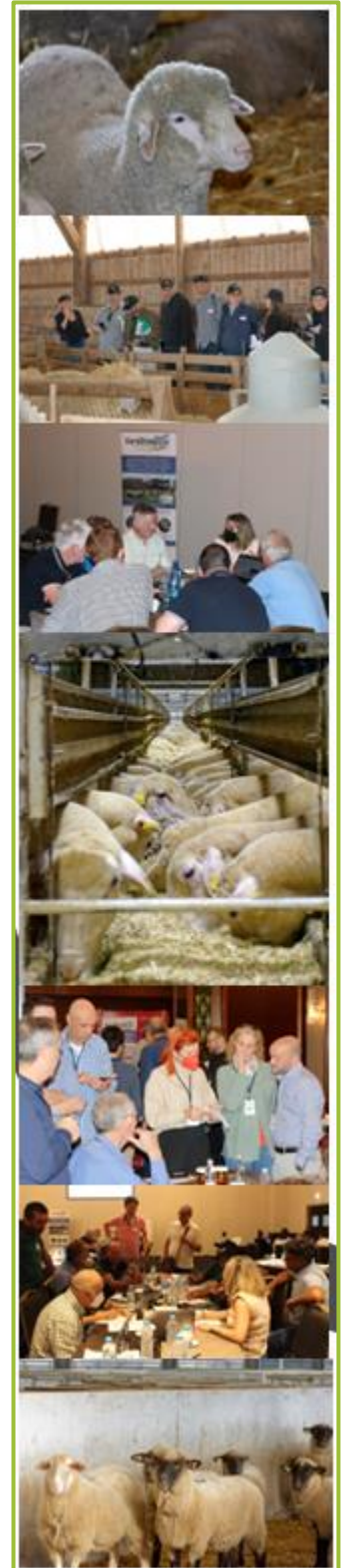
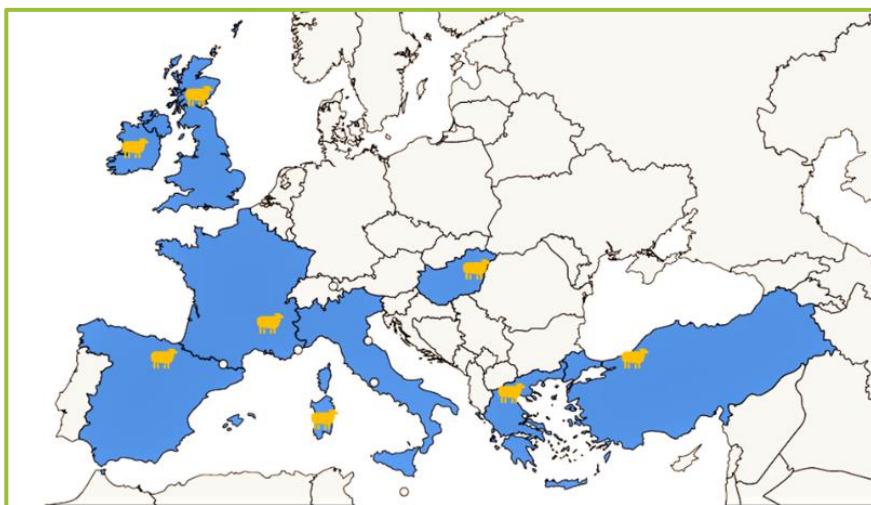




What is EuroSheep?

EuroSheep, which started in January 2020, was funded by the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme and is a continuation from the SheepNet project.

EuroSheep focused on milking ewes, lambs and replacement animals. The aim of EuroSheep is to improve sheep profitability through health and nutrition management and encourage the exchange of best practices and knowledge between sheep farmers, stakeholders and researchers across Europe. EuroSheep is an innovative thematic network, which has brought together a wide range of stakeholders from the main sheep producing countries in Europe (Ireland, France, Italy, Greece, Hungary and Spain, which account for approximately 80% of the EU sheep flocks), and from Turkey and the UK.



❖ General findings

In general, the findings of the project confirm that:

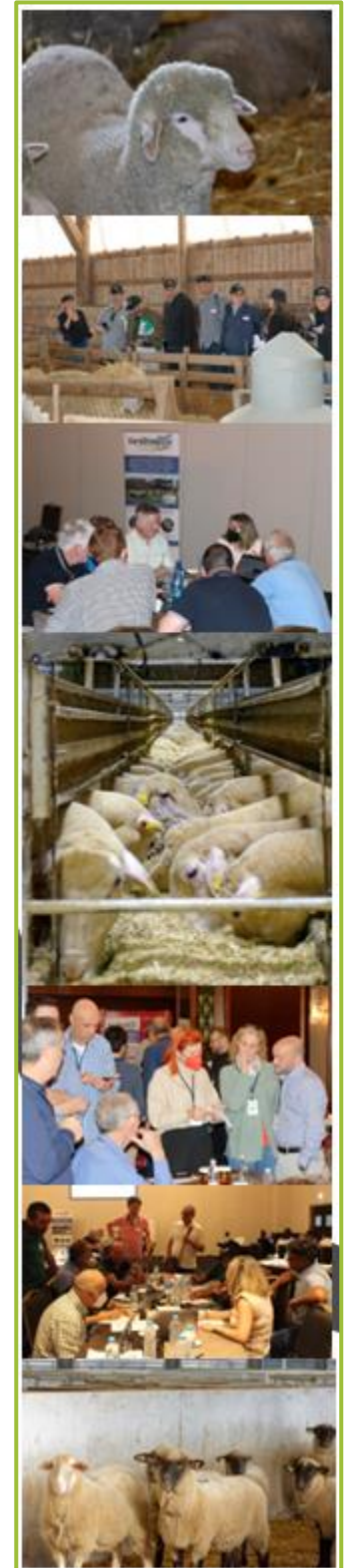
- There is **major scope to improve ewe efficiency and productivity (and thus profitability)** with better nutrition and health management.
- The **needs of producers are similar** across a diverse range of systems, regions, and countries.
- **Solutions exist** for many of the needs and challenges identified by sheep producers and are transferable across the EU and beyond.
- **Information source** used to obtain information on sheep health and nutrition management **depends on the type of stakeholder**, and the region they are in, requiring the information.
- **Good communication** consists of using **many different types of media** and translating into the native language to deliver the information.
- There are **many best practices** at farm level that are **transferable** to improve efficiency and profitability on sheep farms.
- **Networking is a long process** that need the strong involvement of stakeholders thus the duration of Thematic Networks should be at least 4 years – profiting from SheepNet previous network has been invaluable.
- The **impact of the pandemic has been huge** on the networking activities, and although using online methods allowed for exchanges to continue, this could not replace the multi-actor dynamic that face-to-face workshops allow.
- 3 years is a relatively short time to adapt and implement all the solutions produced by the stakeholders and **results need to be promoted after the end of the project.**

❖ Key messages

Two key messages have been developed into policy briefs:

- 1) **Assessing multi-actor approach post-Covid 19**
- 2) From the sheep farmers' needs to the research gaps

This document presents the **1st key message and recommendations.**





What are the challenges?

Engaging stakeholders in a multi-actor approach to exchange ideas or communicate messages is crucial to dissemination. A successful transfer of findings from research to the grassroots is critical to encourage uptake by industry and the sheep sector. Key messages may not reach their audience due to stakeholders being unaware of the existence of relevant best practices that could help improve efficiency and productivity on their farms.

To engage effectively stakeholders in identifying issues and defining solutions in a multi-actor approach, a number of challenges need to be considered.

The primary challenge is for the relevant **stakeholders to be engaged** and interested enough to be willing to participate. This means identifying relevant audiences and existing networks. In addition, trying to have representative stakeholders, regarding the different farming systems in the different countries is also a challenge to be sure to produce interesting outcomes for all the sheep sector of the country.

The second major barrier to a multi-actor approach is **language** during international events. Many stakeholders understand and speak fluently only their native language, therefore exchanges in other language can be ineffective.

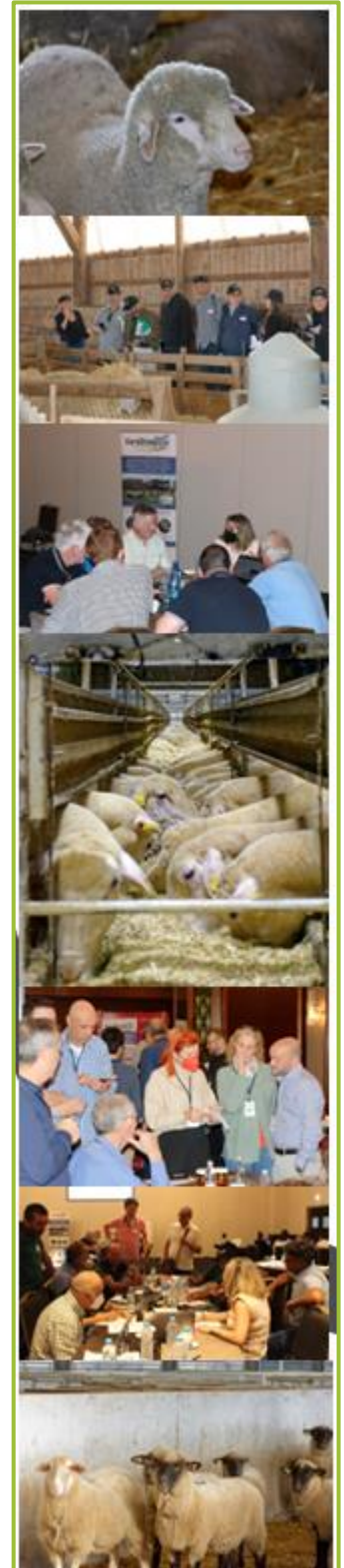
The third challenge is that any exchange needs to be organised and facilitated in a **correct format for the targeted audience**. The target stakeholders need to envisage the potential benefits and impacts that their contribution will make.

The fourth challenge is to keep the same **actors involved and committed all along the project** and to guaranty their participation in the lifetime of the project.

A fifth challenge is the **facilitation techniques to master**, which may not be the same for online or face-to-face events.

Another challenge, specifically for sheep, is the fact that we cover **2 productions: meat and dairy**. It is important to consider the different needs and expectations of both productions in the activities, to ensure we keep involved farmers during the lifetime of the project.

A last challenge is compensating economically, at least partially, for the **participation costs** of some of the stakeholders.





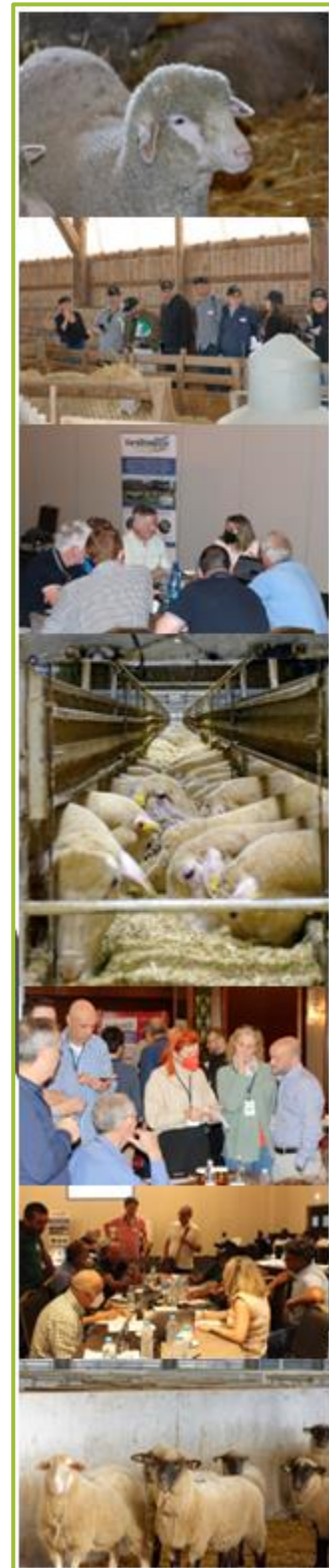
What did we learn from EuroSheep?

EuroSheep, at the start of the project, undertook a survey of existing sheep networks, farmers' groups, and EIP-OGs on similar themes in the project countries, to capitalise on those existing structures. These networks were used subsequently as the primary go-to when organising discussions and workshops. These networks varied across the countries.

Due to the pandemic, the initial multi-actor approach format of face-to-face discussions and workshops, with participatory activities, had been curtailed. **EuroSheep had to adapt and turn to different formats** to engage with those groups.

This included:

- ❖ Online meetings using the most popular/easy to access software, requiring no installation or specific login (e.g., Zoom or Teams)
- ❖ Use of online whiteboards or online quizzes (e.g., mentimeter) to engage easily with farmers or stakeholders who may only access the meeting on their phone.
- ❖ Limit the size of presentations and videos, to cope with connectivity of participants.
- ❖ Ensure translation is timely and correct, for instance using professional translation on different audio-channels to allow stakeholders to fully participate to the discussions. This can be challenging when experts, who may not have advanced language skills, are needed to present specific topics.
- ❖ Use of smaller breakout rooms during the meeting, to encourage debate at least within each language – one room per language. Whilst this allows for stakeholders to discuss more freely during the meeting, this prevents any wider interaction between the different countries.
- ❖ Ensure timing of meetings does not clash with farming activities – a bigger challenges with the different time zones (3 hours differences between Ireland and Turkey).
- ❖ Have a time-limit on the meetings – online attention-span of participants can fade fast, so workshops had to be kept short but to

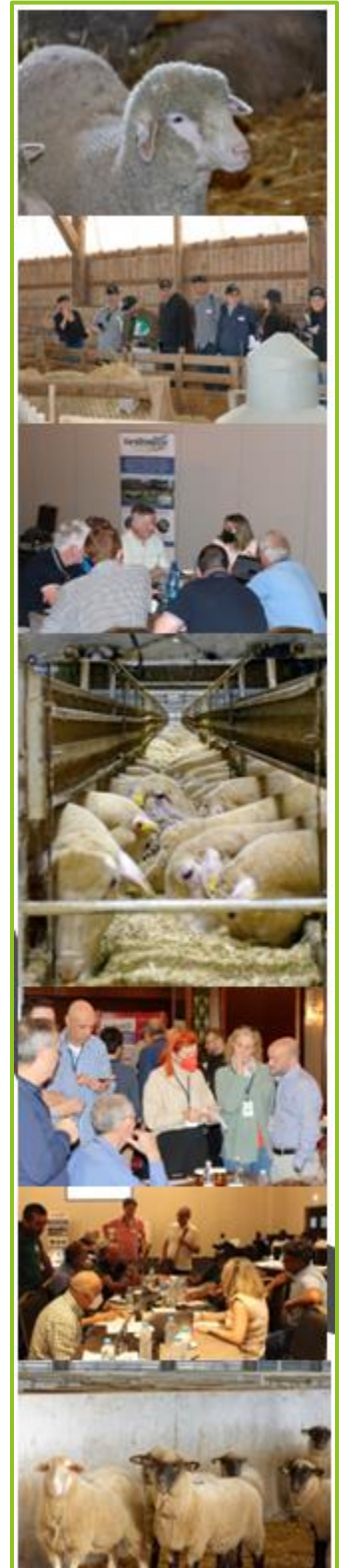


the point. This also means that social interaction or small talk was impossible.

- ❖ Be aware of the connectivity issues some participants can encounter and the difficulties they can have to participate during the whole meetings.

Once face to face meetings were possible again, however, other lessons were learnt:

- ❖ Issues in gathering the relevant actors in one place – stakeholders were much solicited once the restrictions were lifted, and many meetings, workshops and wider social activities were often clashing. The EuroSheep team in each country used sometimes parallel meetings to find suitable dates and made extensive use of the existing identified networks. Some meetings were done in hybrid – some physical, with a video link to those who could not attend in person.
- ❖ Issues in gathering people abroad for transnational workshops – reliability of travel means, and uncertainty of rules made stakeholders more hesitant to participate. However, once gathered, exchanges and interactions were more fruitful, with more time during those meetings (e.g., 2 days instead of 3 hours) for interactions, ad-hoc translations between participants, and general discussions.
- ❖ Taking advantage of existing meetings in countries was an efficient use for the organisation of cross-visits and exchanges.
- ❖ Organising physical meeting was more efficient for spontaneous discussions between stakeholders, and physical meeting are richer for the participants than online meeting and resulted in more “complex” works.
- ❖ The perspectives of visiting flocks and farming systems in foreign countries, different situations, and realities abroad, is an additional stimulus to attend.





What do we recommend?

Following the previous considerations, we recommend:

- 1) To ask **the stakeholders needs at the beginning of the project**, to involve them from the beginning and to be sure to keep them interested during the lifetime of the project.
- 2) To **make most use of EIP OGs and local farmers' groups** when organising meetings and don't hesitate to organise common meetings.
- 3) To **have both online and face-to-face meetings** during the project and to combine them, for they both have some advantages.
- 4) To keep in mind that **face-to-face approach allows more rich exchanges** between stakeholders, whilst **online meetings allow to involve more people**.
- 5) To **organise technical visits during transnational workshops** to present the typicity of the sheep system of the country hosting the event. This is an important aspect to encourage farmers to participate.
- 6) To **compensate** (at least partially) **farmers' costs associated with their absence** from their farms to ensure their participation at transnational workshops lasting several days.
- 7) To **finance extra costs for the translation** during international activities (online or face to face) and to take it in account in the provisional budget.



@EuroSheepEU



www.eurosheep.network



EuroSheep



EuroSheep EU



@EuroSheepEU



EuroSheep EU

