English version

AREPO analysis on the "EU strategic approach to Research and Innovation"

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AREPO
ASSOCIATION DES RÉGIONS EUROPÉENNES DES PRODUITS D'ORIGINE

The Association of European Regions for Products of Origin

The European network of regions and producer associations
that deals with products of quality and origin

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Attention! *This document does not express an AREPO political position.*
It simply is a technical analysis realised by AREPO services.

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Part 1 | Context and overview of the Strategy



On 8 September 2026, the European Commission adopted the New Strategic Approach to Research and Innovation for competitive, resilient and sustainable agriculture, forestry, rural areas and food systems (COM(2026) 453 final). The Communication establishes two interlinked strategic frameworks to guide EU research and innovation towards 2040: **AgRI** 2040, covering agriculture, forestry and rural areas, and **Food** 2040, covering food systems, including fisheries and aquaculture . These framework provide a common direction for identifying research needs, developing priorities with stakeholders and supporting the uptake of results.

The Communication's starting point is that Europe produces valuable scientific knowledge, but research results do not always reach farms, food businesses or rural communities. Therefore, it seeks to address the barriers that prevent European research and innovation (R&I) strengths to be put into practice, including fragmented funding, limited investment capacity, regulatory complexity and uneven access to knowledge, particularly among smaller businesses and farms.

Against this background, the strategic approach **connect research, investment and practical uptake**. It updates the 2016 agricultural R&I approach and builds on Food 2030, in line with the Vision for Agriculture and Food and the EU life sciences strategy.

The New Strategic Approach to Research and Innovation proposes policy orientations for future research priorities and a timetable for action. However, it does not establish a dedicated budget or determine future funding and eligibility conditions for future calls. Decisions on programmes and resources, including in the next EU budget period, will follow separately.

The approach is guided by **six cross-cutting priorities** that guide both AgRI 2040 and Food 2040:

1. Competitiveness, startups and scaleups;
2. Food security, resilience and preparedness;
3. Natural resources and circularity;
4. Food and feed safety, nutrition and health;
5. Fairness;
6. Global cooperation.

Three common enablers support the implementation of these priorities: governance; technologies; and territories and communities.

The thematic areas below identify the fields in which research and innovation needs will be identified and refined with stakeholders.

AgRI 2040 identifies **eight preliminary areas of action**:

- Soil, agri-ecosystems, water and nutrient capital;
- Cropping systems;
- Livestock systems;

- Bioeconomy in agriculture, forestry and rural areas;
- Multi-functional forests;
- Rural areas;
- Stronger agri-food value chains;
- Digitalisation, artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics.

Food 2040 complements this framework through six areas covering:

- Place-based food systems;
- Healthy and sustainable diets;
- Resource efficiency and zero-pollution in food systems;
- Food environments and consumer empowerment;
- Scaling innovation and fair business models;
- Aquatic food systems.

AgRI 2040 and Food 2040 overlap on some issues, meaning that some research questions will be addressed jointly across the two frameworks.

This analysis will focus on the explicit recognition of geographical indications (GIs) within the proposed strategic approach to R&I, the role of territories and local knowledge, and how regional authorities and producer groups might participate in research.

Part 2 | Research and innovation for territorial value creation

I. From research results to practical uptake

The Commission wants research results to move more easily from laboratories and pilot projects into practical use and, where appropriate, commercial products or services. Particularly, it intends to make EU-funded projects more business-oriented, improve the involvement of market experts in proposal evaluation and explore mechanisms that lower entry barriers for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and startups. Possible instruments include simplified procedures, cascade funding (a mechanism whereby a project receiving EU funding can provide smaller grants to other participants under defined rules), support for building project partnerships and additional funding for promising research results.

To bridge research to market application, the Commission intends to explore pathways connecting funding sources at different stages of innovation, including the proposed links between Horizon Europe and the future European Competitiveness Fund. It also intends to explore innovation vouchers and more tailored intellectual property support. The implementation of these measures remains depend on the relevant funding programmes and instruments.

The second objective concerns **the uptake of knowledge by farmers, foresters and rural actors**. The Communication recognises that innovations are more likely to be adopted when users help develop

them, test them under real-life conditions and receive support from advisors and peers. It therefore builds on the **multi-actor approach and Living Labs**, understood as collaborative environments for testing solutions in specific places.

The Commission intends to strengthen evaluation and monitoring of these approaches, explore support for early stakeholder involvement and fair remuneration for participation, and facilitate connections between practitioners and projects. Farmers' organisations, cooperatives, advisory services and agricultural chambers are encouraged to participate. The Communication also calls for projects to assess the economic, environmental and social costs and benefits of proposed innovations.

To improve knowledge transfer, the approach reinforces **synergies between Horizon Europe and the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)**. It promotes closer links between Horizon Europe national contact points and CAP networks, stronger cooperation between Living Labs and Operational Groups under the European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability (EIP-AGRI), and the dissemination of results through EU Thematic Knowledge Hubs. Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS), advisory services and training should help turn findings into usable practices.

Annex 1 sets out 19 actions with indicative starting dates, already beginning at the end of 2026 and continuing until 2028. Practical opportunities for GI actors remain dependent on subsequent research priorities, work programmes and calls for proposals.

While these measures could improve access to innovation, their practical value for territorially embedded production systems will depend on accessible participation arrangements, appropriate advisory support and research outcomes suited to the needs of smaller producers.

II. Territories, communities and local knowledge

The proposed strategic approach to R&I explicitly recognises **territories and communities as an enabling condition for innovation**. Regions are presented as environments in which technological and social innovations can be tested, adapted and embedded. Place-based approaches connect local resources, knowledge and people, while cooperation between territories can combine complementary capabilities.

This territorial dimension includes local and regional food systems, links between cities and rural areas, Living Labs, LEADER, smart villages and interregional cooperation under Smart Specialisation Strategies. The Food 2040 action area on place-based food systems likewise recognises the diversity of European food cultures and territories as a basis for innovation and social cohesion.

Although GIs are not explicitly mentioned in this part of the Communication (Food 2040), this approach is consistent with the territorial foundations of EU quality policy and origin-linked production systems, which connect products with local knowledge, food cultures and regional economies. These dimensions are also central to the work carried out under the Horizon Europe project "GI SMART", including sustainability and territorial development.

The emphasis on cooperation and local value creation is also relevant to GI value chains, where producers often work collectively and production is closely linked to a defined territory.

The Communication also highlights **traditional knowledge and practitioner-led solutions**, which the Commission intends to help validate and disseminate. In parallel, the rural areas research agenda addresses generational renewal, women's and young people's entrepreneurship, services,

infrastructure and skills. The Communication also envisages more systematic participation by regional authorities, educators and civil society.

Taken together, these elements suggest scope for combining scientific knowledge with local know-how, while adapting innovation to the diversity of European production systems.

III. Geographical indications

The most direct reference to GIs appears in the **AgRi 2040 area of action "Stronger agri-food value chain"**, addressing local processing and marketing, short and regional supply chains, and the development of innovative business models aimed at **strengthening farmers' economic position in the value chain**.

This is particularly relevant from a policy perspective, as **it places GIs within the EU's broader policy framework for competitiveness and innovation in the agri-food sector,** alongside their established links to origin and tradition. It is also consistent with the Vision for Agriculture and Food, which announced further encouragement of GI uptake, and identifies research and innovation as a means of supporting EU quality schemes.

The Communication also identifies research needs in climate adaptation, livestock health and soil and water management, and the valorisation of by-products. Its cross-cutting priority on food and feed safety, nutrition and health includes food chain integrity, covering authenticity, traceability and fraud prevention. These are wider research themes, not dedicated GI measures.

The proposed approach explicitly recognises GIs but the reference to them remains broad. It does not define specific GI research topics or establish a GI-specific budget, call or eligibility category. Whether this recognition leads to concrete opportunities will depend on subsequent research priorities, work programmes and calls.

Part 3 | Conclusions and points to monitor

The Communication explicitly recognises GIs among the EU quality schemes that research and innovation should support to strengthen farmers' position in agri-food value chains. It also gives importance to territories, local knowledge and the practical use of research results. However, **it does not yet set out a specific research agenda or funding instrument for GIs.**

A first point to monitor is **how the preliminary AgRI 2040 areas and Food 2040 activities are developed with stakeholders, particularly from the fourth quarter of 2027 and the third quarter of 2028 respectively.**

Future work programmes and calls will determine whether the broad recognition of GIs becomes a practical opportunity for GI producer groups and regions.

A second point concerns access and participation. As discussed above, the Commission envisages closer links between research programmes, advisers, CAP networks, Operational Groups and Living Labs. The relevance of these arrangements for GI actors will depend on whether smaller producers and producer groups can participate and make practical use of the results.

Finally, the territorial dimension merits attention. The emphasis on place-based food systems, traditional knowledge and cooperation between territories is relevant to GI production systems, even where GIs are not named explicitly. The key question is how future research activities will reflect local conditions and the needs of origin-linked value chains.

Overall, the approach offers a relevant policy framework, but its practical significance for the GI sector will depend on the priorities, participation arrangements and funding opportunities defined during implementation.

Part 4 | Useful links

- EC page dedicated to AgRI 2040 and the new strategic approach
- Communication and Annex 1: COM (2026) 453 final

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