Participation in EU projects: real life experiences

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UK Research and Innovation

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From a farmer, cooperative & small enterprise perspective

EU Funding landscape

CAP Investment Measures

National/regional funds for on-farm investment. Managed by paying agencies. **Most accessible** for individual farmers.

ELIGIBLE COSTS

- **Machinery & equipment** — tractors, seed processing, drying, cleaning
- **Storage & infrastructure** — warehouses, cold storage, greenhouses
- **Irrigation systems** and water management
- **On-farm processing** — packaging lines, sorting equipment
- **Diversification** — agri-tourism, farm shops, energy production
- **Land improvement** — fencing, drainage, access roads
- **ICT & digital tools** — precision farming, farm management software

% Co-financing 40–80% · You pre-finance, then get reimbursed

Horizon Europe

EU's flagship R&D programme. Multi-partner consortia. Farmers typically join as **practice partners**.

ELIGIBLE COSTS

- **Personnel costs** — your time spent on project tasks (hourly rate)
- **Travel & subsistence** — project meetings, conferences, farm visits
- **Equipment** — only depreciation during project period (not full purchase)
- **Consumables & supplies** — seeds, substrates, testing materials
- **Subcontracting** — external lab analysis, translation, consulting
- **Other direct costs** — field trial costs, event hosting, dissemination
- **Indirect costs** — 25% flat rate on top of direct costs (overhead)

% 100% funded · Pre-financing available (up to 50-70% at start)

EIP-AGRI / Operational Groups

Innovation projects linking farmers, advisors, researchers. **Best entry point** — practical, local, farmer-centred.

ELIGIBLE COSTS

- **Personnel costs** — farmer's own time dedicated to the project
- **Running costs of innovation** — field trials, testing, prototyping
- **Consumables** — seeds, inputs, materials for trials
- **Travel** — study visits, partner meetings, knowledge exchange
- **External expertise** — advisors, researchers, facilitators
- **Dissemination** — leaflets, events, online content, videos
- **Small equipment** — directly linked to innovation activity

% 60–100% funded · Rules vary by country/region

What you actually get from EU projects?

Money you don't have to repay

Grants, not loans. CAP co-finances 40–80%, Horizon & EIP cover up to 100% of eligible costs.

Access to knowledge and networks

Working with researchers, breeders, advisors and other farmers across Europe. You learn what works elsewhere.

Equipment and infrastructure

CAP investments let you buy machinery, build storage, upgrade processing — things you'd postpone for years.

Market visibility and credibility

Being in a Horizon or EIP project puts your name on the map. Partners, customers, and policymakers notice.

Training and skills

Erasmus+ and EIP projects include study visits, exchanges, and workshops. Your team comes back sharper.

Innovation you can't afford alone

New varieties, digital tools, quality protocols — developed collectively, available to you first.

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The real cost: what nobody tells you!

Your time is the biggest cost

Reporting, meetings, coordination — 15–30% of your working time during the project. Nobody compensates for the energy drain.

Cash flow gaps are real

EU pays in arrears or after milestones. You pre-finance 3–12 months of costs. Small farms feel this hard.

Administrative burden is heavy

Timesheets, financial reports, audit trails, procurement rules. One mistake can delay your payment by months.

Language and cultural barriers

Most Horizon projects work in English. Reporting is in English. If that's not your strength, budget for translation.

You're the junior partner

In Horizon consortia, research institutes lead. Your voice matters less. Your practical needs may not be the priority.

Results take time to materialise

A 3-year project won't make you profitable in year 1. Benefits often come after the project ends.

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CAP experiences

CAP INVESTMENT MEASURES

- **Co-financing** for machinery, storage, processing, irrigation, greenhouses
- **40–80% grant rate** depending on country and measure — you cover the rest
- Managed by your **national paying agency** — a system most farmers already know
- Good for **tangible improvements** you need now — things you'd postpone for years
- Application is **simpler** than Horizon or EIP — familiar forms, local language
- Watch out: **long approval times**, strict procurement rules, reimbursement after investment

Best for: individual farmers needing equipment or infrastructure upgrades

Apply if…

Good conditions for a project application

CRITERIA

- You have a real problem the project could solve
- You can commit 1–2 people for the project duration
- You can survive 3–6 months without the first payment
- You want to learn, not just collect a cheque
- You have — or can find — trustworthy partners

Don't apply if…

Warning signs before you commit

RED FLAGS

- You only want the money — no interest in the work
- You can't handle the admin or won't hire someone who can
- You're already stretched thin and can't dedicate time
- You expect the project to save your business
- Your partners are unreliable or uncommitted

10 Tips from Farmers Who've Done It

1

Start with EIP, not Horizon

Build experience locally before going European.

2

Find a good coordinator

80% of your experience depends on who manages the project.

3

Budget admin realistically

10–20% of your budget should go to project management.

4

Negotiate your role early

Define exactly what you'll do, deliver, and decide — in writing.

5

Keep a cash reserve

Pre-finance at least 6 months of project costs before you start.

6

Track time from day one

Timesheets are the #1 audit issue. Set up a system immediately.

7

Attend consortium meetings

If you're absent, decisions are made without you.

8

Document everything with photos

Field trials, workshops, farm visits — visual proof matters.

9

Use the project for YOUR goals

Align project tasks with improvements you actually need.

10

Stay after the project ends

The network is the real asset. Keep the contacts alive.

How to PITCH?

Pitch – 6 key questions

1. WHAT IS YOUR PRODUCT OR SERVICE?
2. WHO IS YOUR MARKET?
3. WHAT IS YOUR REVENUE MODEL?
4. WHO IS BEHIND THE COMPANY?
5. WHO IS YOUR COMPETITION?
6. WHAT IS YOUR COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE?

Your turn — practice it now!

Answer all 6 questions in under 60 seconds.
If you can't explain it simply, you don't understand it well enough.

60 seconds. 6 answers. Go.

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Elevator Pitch - do´s & dont´s

Do

Start with the problem
Hook them in 5 seconds with a relatable pain point — make them feel it before you offer the solution.

Keep it under 60 seconds
One clear message, one ask. If you can't say it in a minute, you don't know it well enough yet.

End with a specific ask
"Can we meet next week?" beats "Let me know if you're interested." Give them one easy next step.

Don't

Lead with your CV
Nobody cares about your background until they care about your idea. Lead with value, not biography.

Use jargon or buzzwords
If they have to ask what you mean, you've already lost them. Speak like you're talking to a curious friend.

Wing it
Practice until it sounds natural, not rehearsed. Spontaneity is earned through repetition, not avoided by it.

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Thanks for your attention!