



EUROPEAN NETWORK FOR AGROECOLOGICAL FOOD SYSTEMS (ENAF)

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Introduction

The global food system is flawed. Not only is it not delivering healthy and nutritious food but it is also a key contributor to environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, malnutrition, rural poverty and climate change, to name a few. Agroecology has gained momentum within scientific, academic and political spaces as an alternative and holistic approach that incorporates considerations that go beyond the farm gate and can be applied at the field, farm, regional, national and whole food system level.

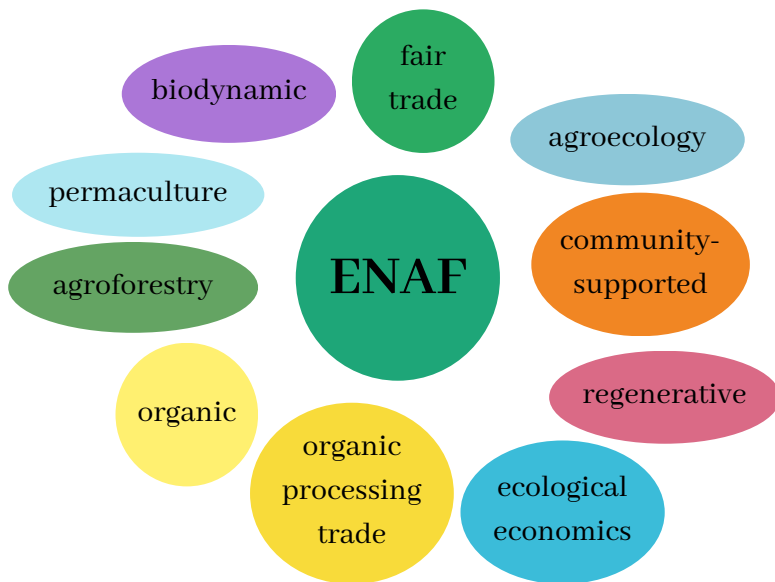
In order to strengthen the processes and mechanisms related to an agroecological transformation of farming and food systems, the AE4EU project envisioned a platform where networks and associations could come together to pool knowledge and resources, and to provide mutual encouragement and support to enhance the potential impact on advancing the application of agroecological principles. After a year of deliberation amongst the project and various other networks and groups from across Europe, the European Network for Agroecological Food Systems (ENAF) was founded as a network of networks on 26 January 2023.

Growing from common ground

The network was founded as a way for various networks to have a platform for exchange on both practice and policy in order for farmer and civil society networks to learn from one another across borders. Coming together creates a common voice from the values shared across networks toward a common vision. By sharing resources and information, grassroots organisations normally on the periphery of decision-making processes in agriculture can have more impact on research and policy agendas.

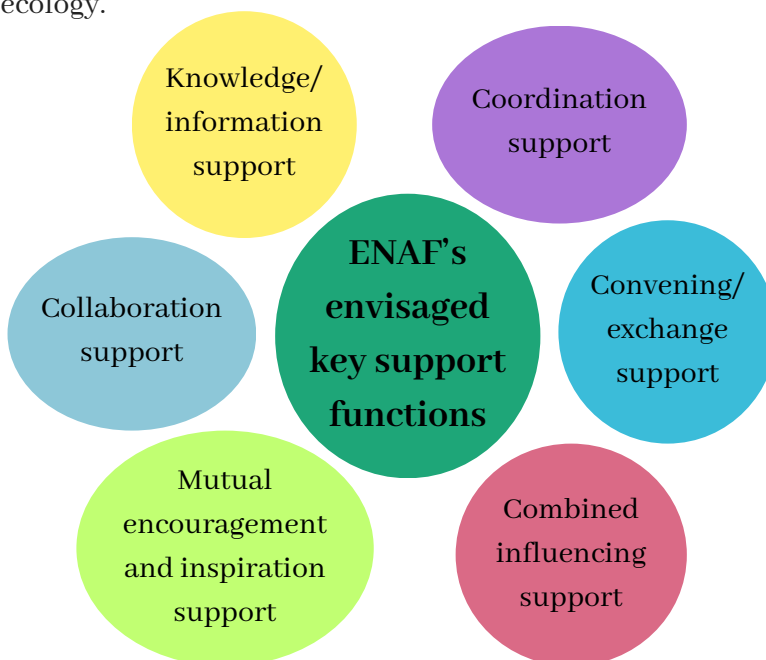
ENAF's mission is "to activate the combined potential and capabilities of existing national and European networks to be able to contribute more effectively across sectors to agroecological transformations of agricultural and food systems in Europe." Its aim is to create a body that will be guided by voices from the bottom up and bring to the fore the voices of small-scale farmer organisations from all corners of Europe. This in itself is its added value, as agroecology has historically been more present in Western Europe and less in Eastern Europe. This larger range of perspectives will create a more democratic, unbiased perspective, that will allow everyone to be part of agroecological transitions in their own contextualized way. The strength of agroecology is its ability to create a system that is not one-size-fits-all. The food system transitions must create room to follow small-scale, agroecological, local pathways.





ENAF focuses on connecting existing networks, associations, and umbrella organisations, not individuals or individual organisations, with the aim of complementing what the networks already work on while increasing synergies and supporting a shared effort to enhance the efficacy of their work. This includes creating opportunities for a stronger, combined voice and influence in relation to policy and research agendas. Additionally, it allows ideas to spread more rapidly across national boundaries, thus supporting local innovation.

ENAF is rooted in an understanding of agroecology as an integrated food system approach that gives equal value to social, economic, and environmental dimensions. The vision of ENAF is to see people across Europe enjoy all the good that comes with food systems grounded in the principles of agroecology, since they are environmentally conscious, socially just, and economically fair. While all of the various members and co-founders of ENAF orientate themselves in different ways, for example identifying as organic, biodynamic, regenerative, or community-supported, they focus on the common ground and converge around agroecology.



Governing the network of networks

ENAF's governance follows the principles of decentralization, democratization and responsibility, the values we want to see in the food system of the future. While the network was founded by a handful of organisations, the governance of the network will occur in rotation, with an equal balance of larger, Europe-wide networks and associations and smaller national networks. This is to ensure that the network continues to focus on the bottom up and not create another EU-focused organization or academic space.

ENAF was founded by three international organisations, Agroecology Europe, Slow Food, and La Via Campesina, and two national ones, Ecoruralis (Romania) and Agroecologie Network (Netherlands). The governance positions for national networks are envisioned to rotate. Any organisation can join as long as they contribute in some way to a nature-centred transition in agriculture.

Membership will be divided between members and followers. Members are formally accepted into the network and have voting rights, whereas followers are interested in the goals of ENAF but for various reasons are not members.

In this early stage, ENAF is finalising a governance strategy. Its diverse member networks are identifying points of agreement and common ground, centring around a bottom-up approach and nature-based solutions. Other approaches and practices, for instance climate farming or organic certifications, will require more discussion and debate to arrive at a shared position. ENAF's two-pronged external strategy will envision how this ecosystem can open up to the world, influencing the EU agenda while strengthening bottom-up approaches. These codified internal and external strategies will solidify the structure and mission of a newly founded entity, consolidating lessons learned, synergies, and expertise from the AE4EU project before it spins off at the project's end. To discuss all of these and outline the next steps and priorities, the network will meet for the first time in person at the Agroecology Europe Forum in November 2023, in Hungary.

To summarize, the uniqueness of ENAF is that it brings together European and national agroecological bodies that represent agroecological farmers. Therewith, it becomes a valuable partner for the European Partnership on Accelerating farming systems transition: agroecology living labs and research infrastructures. ENAF will contribute to essential tasks of the European partnership on Agroecology, such as building a research infrastructure of farmer-led knowledge production and sharing knowledge on agroecology across Europe. A European network of networks that supports farmer innovation on agroecology will accelerate the transition. Furthermore, the resulting alignment across farmer-led national and European networks on policies that support agroecological practices will ensure significant steps towards sustainable farming and food systems in Europe. This way, ENAF complements multi-actor living labs and research infrastructures mainly steered by scientists. However, the continuity of ENAF requires a substantial effort of founding organisations to allocate sufficient labour hours to ENAF. Previously it was suggested by diverse stakeholders involved in the European Partnership development, that this partnership may provide opportunities for ENAF. **Therefore, with this policy brief, we call for a yearly contribution to ENAF by the European partnership on agroecology.**

For more information

European Network for Agroecological Food systems (ENAF)

<https://www.ae4eu.eu/european-network-for-agroecological-food-systems/>

European R&I partnership on agroecology living labs and research

infrastructures https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/research-area/agriculture-forestry-and-rural-areas/ecological-approaches-and-organic-farming/partnership-agroecology_en

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More information about the H2020-Agroecology for Europe project:

www.ae4eu.eu

www.twitter.com/ae4eu_H2020

www.youtube.com/channel/UCOsUVqM8tOhE28Gr2xcp2_w

Additional policy briefs created by AE4EU can be found at:

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