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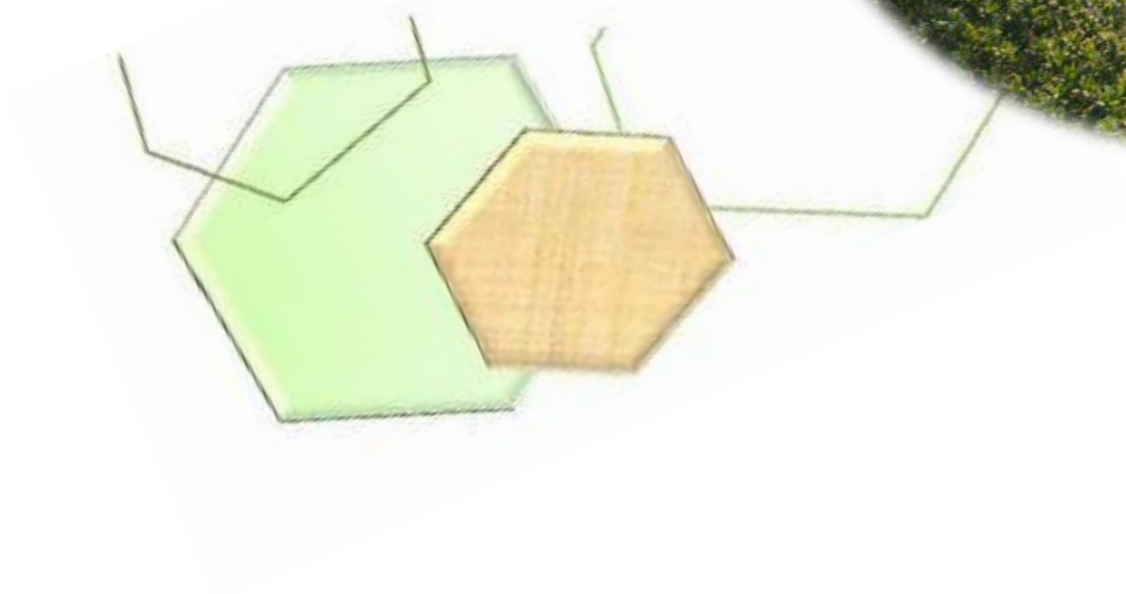
EAGER - Easing Agrophotovoltaics for Europe

Newsletter № 2

November 2024

Contents:

1. *First Study Visit - Lithuania*
2. *News from Poland*
3. *News from Germany*
4. *News from Lithuania*
5. *News from Serbia*
6. *News from Belgium*
7. *EAGER Partnerships and Communication Channels*



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What is EAGER

[The EAGER project](#) is a European project funded by the INTERREG Europe Programme that facilitates the adoption of agro-photovoltaic systems across partner regions. By fostering a shared understanding of this technology, identifying best practices, and enhancing policy instruments, this project is paving the way for a greener future.

The expansion of renewable energies aims at meeting the energy demand of the EU while replacing fossil fuels, but it requires large areas of land. At the same time, food security is threatened by the impacts of climate change and a growing world population. **Agrophotovoltaics (APV) can mitigate the conflicting interests between agriculture and open space photovoltaic systems** for viable land, as it allows to produce energy and food at the same time on the same place through a combination of farming and solar generation with a total **land use efficiency of up to 186%**. This is why the EAGER project aims at improving policies **to ease APV in Europe**. It will enable the definition and set-up of favourable policy framework conditions for implementing APV as a praxis-oriented concept for achieving Greener Europe.

In the following pages, you will find interesting materials describing the overall context and objectives of the project as well as information on the latest developments and current events.

If you would like to learn more about the EAGER project our progress or upcoming thematic events check our website.

Project at a glance

By generating a common understanding of APV concept and contexts, identifying, analysing and transferring good practices, changing behaviour among policy actors of the participating regions towards supporting and expanding APV in their regions, **9 policy instruments** will be improved by 2027. The 14 partners and 3 associated policy responsible authorities are committed to high quality and efficient exchange of experience and policy improvement, acknowledging that the topic of APV is multi-layered and complex. It considers the policy fields of energy, agriculture, spatial development and land use, with impacts on economic development, and has the potential to contribute to sustainability and energy security. Its novelty in the regions encourages out of the box thinking and an innovative interpretation of good practices in the broadest sense.

A few numbers



2,440,007 €
budget



01 Apr 2024-
30 Jun 2028



14 partners

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FIRST STUDY VISIT – LITHUANIA

In the period of 9th – 10th of October 2024, a study visit within the framework of the EAGER project - “Easing AGrophotovoltaics for EuRope”, co-funded by the Interreg Europe Programme 2021-2027, took place in Vilnius, Lithuania. All project partners, as well as some stakeholders coming from different countries took part in the event.



Date: 9-10th October 2024

Location: Lithuania

On the first working day, the event started with a welcome speech by representatives from the National Payment Agency, Lithuania and the Lithuanian Innovation Centre. Reports from Lithuanian stakeholders at national and regional level showcased the development of the agricultural and renewable energy sectors in Lithuania. Domantas Mikelevičius, from the Lithuanian Ministry of Energy explained that “Lithuania’s National Energy Independence Strategy aims to ensure the country’s full energy independence by 2050” - Lithuania is expected to grow electricity consumption six times and promote its use in different sectors.

There are also plans to synchronize the electricity system with European networks and improve energy efficiency. Later, Žilvinas Jasiulevičius from the Lithuanian Ministry of Agriculture presented Lithuania's strategic plan for agriculture for 2023-2027 related to solar energy. The presentation described an implemented policy correction which came into force on 7th of October 2024, which established a description of the unit rates of measures of the strategic plan and their numerical values. The updated rules also aim to simplify administrative procedures for the acquisition of renewable energy production facilities (e.g. solar systems). These updates are expected to help increase the popularity of solar investments by making them more available. Antanas Karbauskas, a spokesman for the European Commission, also made a report about the expected challenges, problems and opportunities related to solar power plants in agriculture systems in the European Union. This was followed by a presentation on the existing financing possibilities for the adaptation of solar power plants in agriculture provided by three different Lithuanian ministries.



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Lithuania's regional study was the final presentation for the session which revealed several fundamental problems the sector faces when considering APV, including shading solar panels which affect harvest, infrastructure restrictions in rural areas, and the impact of climate change on agricultural productivity and the efficiency of solar panels systems.

In the afternoon session, each of the project partners presented their policy instrument – what it is about, and the improvements the policy instrument aims to achieve. Partners also presented their good practices identified during the first 6 months of the project. At the end of the first working day, partners discussed pending activities and the next steps of the project.

On the second day, the Lithuanian partners organized several on-site visits to demonstrate innovative solutions and best practices in the area of APV. The tour started with a visit to “The Applied Research Institute for Prospective Technologies”. Interesting research presentations were provided about the institute’s research into solar module testing, integrated energy solutions being developed at the institute, and research being conducted by the Lithuanian Research Centre for Agriculture and Forestry with regards to the impact of (A)PV on crops. After that, partners and stakeholders of EAGER had the opportunity to see the different sections of the laboratory and how different components are being tested and examined for different parameters of productivity.

The second visit was to “Solitek - European Manufacturer of Solar Panels and Batteries”.

They produce more than 80% of the solar modules in Vilnius, Lithuania, the geographic centre of Europe. These are exported to Italy, Sweden, Finland, Germany, Netherlands, United States and many other countries. The participants were introduced to all the production stages of the PV manufacturing process and an overview of the quality control performed on the modules was also provided.

The last trip was to the largest vertical farm for microgreens in Europe called “Leafood”. Their output is much larger compared with traditional farms – approximately 1 tonne of greens is harvested daily, arriving at restaurants and supermarkets within hours of being picked. The total surface area of the vertical farm equates to 1.3ha in a warehouse with floor space of 0.35 ha, enabling them to contribute to saving precious natural resources. The system is very environmentally sustainable, no additional heating is required, the use of LED lighting to simulate day/night conditions consumes 70% less energy than the traditional fluorescent light tubes used in similar systems, and 100% green energy supplied from photovoltaics and wind power plants minimizes damage to the environment.

NEWS FROM POLAND

Podkarpackie Regional Stakeholders Meeting of EAGER project

The first meeting of stakeholders of the EAGER project in Poland, in the Podkarpackie region, was aimed primarily at providing information

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about the project and the subject of agrophotovoltaics.



Date: 2nd October 2024

Location: Podkarpackie region, Poland

This is a fairly new topic in Poland and raises great interest and many questions and problematic issues. During the meeting, attended by representatives of public administration, non-governmental organizations, business support institutions, entrepreneurs, the findings from the first international meeting of the EAGER project and good practices in the field of photovoltaics from Poland and Europe were presented. The meeting showed a very large interest in the project among stakeholders and the desire to continue to engage in the project.

NEWS FROM GERMANY

New Regulation Promotes APV

In Lower Bavaria, approximately 15,000 farmers contribute around €2 billion in gross value

added each year. But many industries depend on a thriving agricultural sector: for instance, 15,000 people are employed downstream in the food processing industry, and tens of thousands more work in upstream sectors such as agricultural machinery and equipment manufacturing, and the supply of feed, seed, and fertilizers. The financial stability APV offers farmers can help promote sustainable growth across these interconnected up- and downstream industries.

Additionally, many of these industries—particularly food processing—are significant energy consumers, with much of their energy still derived from non-renewable sources. APV can provide a direct supply of clean, renewable energy, helping to reduce carbon emissions and promote a more sustainable food chain.

But APV is not without its challenges. While the technology is well-established, the integrated approach of combining it with agriculture is relatively new, presenting a steep learning curve for farmers. Since the effects of APV systems vary based on local conditions and crop types, many questions arise for farmers regarding implementation. Moreover, the levelized cost of electricity for APV is approximately 30% higher than for standard ground-mounted PV systems, making the technology less financially appealing.

To encourage the uptake of APV, the German government has simplified the planning procedure for small APV systems through recent legislative changes. The new Law for Strengthening Digitalization in Land Use Planning Procedures" ("Gesetz zur Stärkung der Digitalisierung im Bauleitplanverfahren"),

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enacted on July 3, 2023, introduces specific privileges for APV installations. Key points of the regulation include:

- **Spatial and Functional Connection:** Projects must be linked to an agricultural operation, ensuring that the facility serves a dual purpose.
- **Size Limitation:** The area of the solar installation must not exceed 25,000 square meters, making it manageable for farmers.
- **Single Installation Rule:** Only one APV system is permitted per farmstead or operational site.

These changes aim to streamline the approval process and support farmers in employing renewable energy solutions on their agricultural land. Clear criteria help facilitate the integration of renewable energy with food production, ultimately fostering a sustainable future for agriculture in the region.

NEWS FROM LITHUANIA

First Stakeholders Meeting in Lithuania of the EAGER project

On September the 10th, 2024, the EAGER project teams from the National Paying Agency and the Lithuania Innovation Center successfully hosted their first online stakeholder meeting. This event brought together key participants from various sectors to discuss the project's goals, challenges, and possibilities. The primary aim was to present and highlight the project's issues, challenges,

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possibilities, and solutions, while gathering valuable feedback from stakeholders.



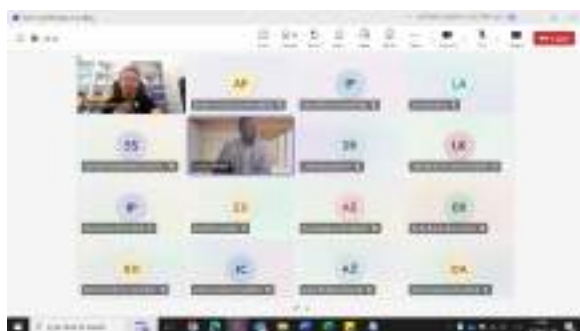
Date: 10th September 2024

Location: Lithuania

The meeting addressed several critical problems, including the shading of APV panels affecting yield, infrastructure limitations in rural areas, and the impact of climate change on agricultural productivity and the efficiency of APV systems. Additionally, the inability to sell surplus energy, limitations in power grid capacity for connecting PV systems, and changing compensation models making it difficult to predict payback were highlighted as significant issues. Furthermore, the absence of centralized data on farmers with installed APV systems in Lithuania was recognized as a challenge.

Participants also discussed various challenges, such as high initial investments, especially for small farmers, complex permitting processes (particularly for systems over 30 kW), and limited technical knowledge and awareness about PV systems. Other issues included the national grid load in rural areas and the environmental protection requirements for systems above 100 kW. The large number of subsidy applications, leading to long evaluation times, was also mentioned as a source of dissatisfaction.

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Despite these challenges, the meeting identified several promising possibilities. These included the dual use of land for agriculture and electricity production, financial incentives for renewable energy projects, technological advancements in APV systems, reduced water evaporation, and improved yields under APV panels. The potential for utilizing large areas of grassland (up to 550,000 ha), some of which are currently unused, for solar farms was also noted, along with the opportunity to install APV systems on rooftops and arable land without major restrictions.

To address these issues and challenges, the meeting proposed several solutions. These included providing targeted financial support to small farmers, simplifying permitting processes, harmonizing land-use regulations, and developing training and educational programs about APV technologies. Other solutions involved introducing a centralized register to track where and how much PV capacity is installed, establishing key performance indicators (KPIs) for APV installations, and publicizing other agencies' calls for solar power plants. Additionally, stakeholders suggested lobbying for the ability to sell surplus energy, supporting the installation of batteries, and ensuring power grid capacity checks before applying for APV support.

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Participants engaged in a lively Q&A session, sharing their experiences and posing critical questions about the project's impact and implementation strategies. The interactive nature of the meeting fostered a collaborative environment, encouraging stakeholders to contribute their expertise and perspectives.

The meeting concluded with a summary of the key takeaways and an outline of the next steps. Some stakeholders expressed interest in being onboard for the project's future development. The EAGER project team expressed their gratitude for the stakeholders' continued support and emphasized the importance of their contributions to the project's success.

This meeting marks a significant step forward in the EAGER project, setting the stage for future collaborations and advancements in agricultural photovoltaic (APV) systems.

NEWS FROM SERBIA

First Stakeholders Meeting in Serbia of the EAGER project

At the jubilee 100th international fair in Novi Sad, Serbia, the manager of the project for the Municipality of Backa Palanka, a partner in the project, Dr. Mirjana Kranjac, presented the EAGER (Easing AGrophotovoltaics for EuRope) project to the different stakeholders groups. There were over 500 people present, mostly farmers, engineers, students, pupils, decision makers. The audience was very interested to learn about agrophotovoltaics which was completely a new topic for them. They were eager to learn more and after the presentation they posed many questions.

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NEWS FROM BELGIUM

Regional kick-off meeting in Province of Flemish Brabant

A stakeholder meeting with the Province of Flemish Brabant was organized at TRANSfarm on 23rd of October, 2024 to discuss the goals of the EAGER project and reflect on opportunities and hurdles for APV in the region.

Opportunities for using agrophotovoltaics (APV) to maximize renewable energy production in the region were highlighted, alongside concerns. Policymakers must consider spatial limitations in densely populated provinces (e.g., protecting open spaces, preserving heritage value, etc.) and ensure the protection of agricultural land ownership structures. The APV model should be profitable for farmers, without large energy companies acquiring farmland. Farmers' rights and benefits must be safeguarded, enabling them to profit from both agricultural fields and energy production.

This feedback will be shared with partners during the study visit in Vilnius and must be considered when developing the decision matrix for APV during the project.

The pilot facilities of KU Leuven were visited after the meeting.

Stakeholder meetings with local policy makers at Bierbeek

Multiple meetings were organized at TRANSfarm for preparing and initiating the permitting procedure for building a new (larger) APV installation at KU Leuven, as part of



Date: 18th October 2024

Location: Novi Sad, Serbia

Presentation of project EAGER in Brasov, Romania

The manager of the project for the Municipality of Backa Palanka, partner in the project EAGER, Dr. Mirjana Kranjac, presented the EAGER (Easing AGrophotovoltaics for EuRope) project at the final event of the project P2GreenEst. This project supports innovative European SMEs to participate in circular public procurement in the Eastern Partnership countries by introducing them as actors in public market opportunities in Moldova, Serbia and Ukraine.



Date: 24th October 2024

Location: Brasov, Romania

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EAGER's policy learning. In the context of this new permit application, different stakeholder meetings were organized to discuss the goal of the project and regional opportunities.

As TRANSfarm is located within a rural village view, the setup of a new APV installation can impact the perception of people living in the neighborhood. It is known that one of the hurdles of introducing APV into society is the social acceptance of these installations. To facilitate the introduction of a larger APV site at TRANSfarm but located into the village area of Bierbeek, both local policy makers as well as neighbors were invited to be introduced to the ongoing APV projects at TRANSfarm and learn about the future plans. The main outcome of these meetings was the confirmation that the APV concept is still facing a significant 'not in my backyard effect'. The feedback received by the participants was that the concept is innovative, very interesting and beneficial for future sustainable agriculture. However, participants tended to support the APV concept only when it was installed somewhere else, and not within their surroundings.

The learnings and insights will be taken into account when drafting a decision matrix for APV installations in the framework of the EAGER project.

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EAGER Partnerships and Communication Channels

The project includes a well-balanced mixture of partners coming from several main sectors: public authorities (local, regional and national), research institutions, regional development agencies, agriculture representatives, NGOs and energy agencies. Together we represent varied views across a range of stakeholders and interests providing competent knowledge and experience in the field of energy efficiency, renewable energy sources and policy design. The partnership is characterized by a strong transnational character, covering nine nations within the Interreg Europe Program area, thus ensuring a good geographical and cultural coverage and relevant attention to the issues and needs of a wide range of institutional settings and establishments from European Countries.

University of Applied Sciences
Landshut (TZE) - **Lead partner**,
Germany



<https://www.haw-landshut.de>

Public Institution Lithuanian
Innovation Centre (LIC),
Lithuania



<https://www.lic.lt>

Rzeszow Regional Development
Agency (RARR), Poland



<https://rarr.rzeszow.pl>

Agricultural and Agrifood
Technological Center (ITAGRA),
Spain



<https://www.itagra.com>

Palencia Provincial Council
(PALENCIA), Spain



<https://www.diputaciondepalencia.es>

National Paying Agency under
the Ministry of Agriculture of
the Republic of Lithuania (NPA),
Lithuania



<https://nma.lrv.lt>

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Nuovo Circondario Imolese
(NCI), Italy



<https://www.nuovocircondarioimolese.it>

Regional Energy Agency of
Pazardjik (REAP), Bulgaria



<https://reap-bg.eu>

Municipality of Strelcha
(STRELCHA), Bulgaria



<https://strelcha.bg>

Catholic University of Leuven
(KU Leuven), Belgium



<https://www.kuleuven.be>

Municipality of Ruhstorf an der
Rott (RUHSTORF), Germany



<https://www.ruhstorf.de>

Provincial Development Agency
(POM) Flemish Brabant, Belgium



<https://pomvlaamsbrabant.be>

Municipality of Bačka Palanka
(MBP), Serbia



<https://backapalanka.rs>

Institution "Zakarpattia Regional
Development Agency" (ZRDA),
Ukraine



<https://zakarpattia.agency>

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