

CORE Organic Cofund



“SCOOP: Recommendations for policy makers ”

Deliverable report

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Promoting Intercropping Within the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)

Executive Summary

Intercropping—growing two or more crops in proximity on the same land—is a sustainable agricultural practice that enhances biodiversity, improves soil health, reduces pest and disease incidence, and supports climate resilience. Despite its benefits, adoption across the European Union remains limited due to knowledge gaps, policy gaps, lack of technical support, unfit mechanization and market barriers.

It demonstrated to be an excellent agronomic tool in organic farming, being able to positively contribute to several purposes: weed management, crop nutrition, soil fertility, extreme weather events mitigation, facilitation of harvesting operations. In the SCOOP experience, it demonstrated to be a useful tool to grow pulses and some minor crops with the organic method.

This document outlines a strategic framework for promoting intercropping under the CAP, aligning with its environmental and climate goals while supporting farm income and rural development.



1. Introduction

1.1 What is Intercropping?

Intercropping involves cultivating multiple crop species in the same field during a growing season. This includes strip intercropping, relay intercropping, mixed intercropping, and alley cropping. These systems can increase productivity, reduce reliance on external inputs, and foster agroecological resilience. While some Member States have pilot initiatives, a coherent EU-wide policy framework is needed to scale up adoption.

Within the SCOOP project only some of the declinations were tested, focusing on the agronomic path fitting the organic cultivation of camelina and some minor crops.

1.2 Why to promote Intercropping?

- **Environmental benefits:** it enhances biodiversity, reduces erosion, and increases carbon sequestration. Within SCOOP activities it has the additional positive effect of increasing pulses, cereals and aromatic crops cultivation, so increasing the plant-based protein supply within EU;
- **Economic resilience:** it diversifies farm income and reduces input costs. The economic factors in the SCOOP trials were linked to a facilitation of organic cultivation of pulses and other companion crops, that in pure crops results more critical;
- **Climate alignment:** it supports the EU Green Deal, Farm-to-Fork Strategy, and Biodiversity Strategy.

2. The CAP Framework: opportunities for integration

2.1 Eco-Schemes (Pillar I)

Eco-schemes are voluntary environmental practices eligible for direct payment support. Intercropping can be recognized under eco-schemes as a biodiversity-enhancing and soil-improving practice. So far it was not included in any National Eco-scheme.

Recommendations:

- to include intercropping explicitly in the list of eligible Eco-scheme practices, requiring that at least one of the species is a leguminous crop;
- to include intercropping practices within an existing Eco-scheme, for biodiversity enhancing purposes, or for soil protection scopes;
- to develop tiered incentives for more complex or perennial intercropping systems, potentially linked to the support of protein crops enhancement.

2.2 Agri-Environment-Climate Measures (AECMs – Pillar II)

AECMs under rural development can fund multi-year intercropping projects, knowledge transfer, and innovation.

Recommendations:

- to fund demonstration farms showcasing intercropping with the species and the mode of implementation best fitting site-specific potentialities and constraints as well as local market demands;
- to increase the payment under the organic farming measures if intercropping is applied (for the years of implementation);
- to include intercropping practices with one service crop (not harvested but used as cover crop) within the measure supporting cover crop integration in crop rotation;
- to support local adaptation research under the European Innovation Partnership (EIP-AGRI Operational Groups).

2.3 Conditionality and Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions (GAEC) Standards

Cross-compliance rules should encourage more diverse cropping systems.

Recommendations:

- to integrate intercropping as an optional compliance method for GAEC 7 (Crop rotation);
- to use flexibility in implementation to recognize ecological outcomes over structural definitions.

3. Capacity Building and Knowledge Exchange

Recommendations

3.1 Advisory Services

- To train farm advisors in intercropping design and management, including the topic in the mandatory training for farmers and advisers, into vocational education and training (VET) curricula and within the AKIS (Agriculture Knowledge and Innovation System) support measures;
- to establish regional intercropping networks to share knowledge and to set up demonstration farms that showcase intercropping within the local systems.

3.2 Research and Innovation

- To give space to intercropping research in Regional, National and EU research programs;
- to fund on-farm trials under the CAP Strategic Plans.

3.3 Farmer Engagement

- To offer results-based payments for biodiversity or carbon metrics enhanced by intercropping (measuring their contribution);
- to promote success stories and peer-learning platforms.

4. Value Chain Development

Recommendations

- To support processing of intercrop products also through Regional/Nation funding for on farm processing or for collective processing (also within CAP);
- to incentivize collaboration between farmers, agribusinesses, and retailers to create value chains for intercrops.
- to identify and fund (within CAP or other support policies) farm machinery fitting the management of intercropping.

6. Conclusion

Promoting intercropping through the CAP is not only viable but useful for transitioning to a more sustainable and resilient agricultural system in the EU. By aligning incentives, knowledge systems, and market structures, intercropping can become a cornerstone of modern Organic European agriculture and spread as well within conventional farming systems.

Further informations on the project and its outcomes: <https://site.unibo.it/scoop-core-organic/it>