

ARIMNet2 – Coordination of Agricultural Research in the Mediterranean

Publishable Summary

Project context and objectives

Mediterranean countries face a number of common challenges and share priorities in relation to agriculture and its link to socioeconomic development: they strive to enhance food security, employment and welfare while conserving natural resources/landscapes and adapting to climate change. Improving agricultural practices and promoting more sustainable, productive and resilient agricultural and food systems are a common objective for Mediterranean countries.

Agricultural research and innovation (R&I) plays a central role in providing suitable solutions to current and future challenges. However, in the Mediterranean area, agricultural research systems are scattered and fragmented and issues are too often looked at separately on each side of the Mediterranean Sea. Thus the challenge for Mediterranean countries, beyond the enhancement of their own agricultural research capacity, is to join their national capacities through a mechanism allowing to align their programmes and boost multilateral cooperation, which would help to achieve the necessary critical mass and would ensure a stronger impact of R&I on the socioeconomic and environmental development of the whole region.

This is where ARIMNet2 (Coordination of Agricultural Research in the Mediterranean; ERA-NET 2014-2017; www.arimnet2.net) comes into play. ARIMNet2, which builds upon ARIMNet (ERA-NET 2008-2012), involves 24 partners (national funding agencies and research institutions) from 15 countries (Algeria, Croatia, Cyprus, Egypt, France, Greece, Italy, Israel, Malta, Morocco, Portugal, Slovenia, Tunisia, Turkey, Spain), and is funded through the EU 7th Framework Programme for research, technological development and demonstration (Project No. 618127). By strengthening the scientific cooperation between Euro-Mediterranean countries, it supports the identification of shared priorities, the development of research and innovation programmes, the launch of co-funded transnational calls and the implementation of joint capacity-building and networking activities, so as to reduce fragmentation and exploit synergies.

ARIMNet2 has the following objectives:

- To develop an Integrated Strategic Research Agenda (ISRA) (WP1) identifying the key challenges, needs and priorities of Mediterranean agricultural R&I and providing a strategical framework for joint action in the short, medium and long term. The ISRA builds upon the recommendations of the Standing Committee on Agricultural Research (SCAR) and complements existing European initiatives, in particular the FACCE-JPI, paving the way for a more inclusive and effective Euro-Mediterranean cooperation on agricultural R&I;
- To launch Mediterranean Joint Calls to fund new transnational R&I projects related to the enhancement of agriculture practices, the improvement of value chains and the conservation of natural resources and landscapes (WP2);

- To support and monitor the research projects funded via the Joint Calls, so as to valorise/disseminate their results, and assess the calls themselves so as to improve calls' processes and impact (WP3);
- To organise joint activities of scientific and strategic interest for Mediterranean researchers (WP4), so as to boost networking and mobility, develop their skills, and foster the sharing of infrastructure and data;
- To support the development of Mediterranean Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) (WP5), by strengthening the link between R&I and involving stakeholders/users in research activities/projects, to ensure a significant positive impact of agricultural research on the inhabitants and ecosystems of the Mediterranean Region;
- To communicate extensively on ARIMNet2 objectives and achievements and on the overall potential and positive impacts of collaborative/multilateral Mediterranean R&I efforts, and to develop synergies with existing or future initiatives (WP6).

Work performed since the beginning of the project and main results achieved

WP1. Development of an Integrated Strategic Research Agenda (ISRA): A Scientific & Strategic Advisory Board (9 experts from FACCE SAB, ERANETMED, SCAR representatives of Mediterranean EU and non-EU partner countries) was set-up to support the publication of the ISRA. The ISRA is our roadmap for joint action and it will guide future similar initiatives and policy-making. To prepare it, ARIMNet2 partners did a literature review, consulted with stakeholders and synthesised foresight studies identifying Mediterranean priorities in Euro-Mediterranean agriculture R&I policies.

WP2. Preparation and launching of joint calls for transnational research projects: ARIMNet2 successfully launched two Joint Calls and 21 projects were funded: The 2014/15 Call (16 funding agencies, 14 countries, 7 M€) covered 3 topics: Developing sustainable production in the context of increasing ecological and climatic stresses; Enhancing the advantages of Mediterranean agriculture and food; Sustainable management of landscape and resources used by agriculture. 10 projects are funded and started in 2016. The 2016 Call (15 funding agencies, 14 countries, 6 M€) covered 2 topics: Promoting sustainable agriculture for socio-economic development; Valorising local products through food value chains improvement. 11 projects were selected for funding and will start in 2017.

WP3. Monitoring, follow-up and impact assessment of joint calls and funded research projects: To enhance calls' procedures and cost-effectiveness, an assessment of the 2014/15 Call was performed through a survey of the research project coordinators, Call Board and Call Office members, and evaluators. Straightforward call documents and the support provided by the Call Secretariat were key to success. In parallel, funded projects are monitored through reports provided by the coordinators and feedback received during meetings or via emails, and summarised as factsheets/brochures.

WP4. Implementation of joint activities to support cooperation in research: After discussing possible joint activities that would strengthen researchers' skills, networking and mobility, ARIMNet2 partners agreed in 2015 to implement as 1st Pilot Joint Activity, a Young Researchers Seminars (YRS) on the involvement of stakeholders in R&I projects and promotion of young researchers' leadership. The YRS (June 2016, Montpellier) gathered 28 researchers from 13 Mediterranean countries (selected through an open call for candidates) and combined keynotes, training, individual presentations, group work, and a field trip; it was considered by most a success.

WP5. From Research to Innovation: Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) in ARIMNet2 partner countries were analysed based on a literature review and stakeholders consultation. A workshop (June 2014, Montpellier) was organised with ARIMNet2 partners and funded research project coordinators to discuss the situation of Mediterranean AKIS and identify actions to promote innovative projects. An internal seminar (February 2015, Madrid) allowed to prepare the International Conference on Mediterranean AKIS, which was celebrated in Antalya (October 2016): it gathered 75 stakeholders (funding agencies, researchers, farmers, entrepreneurs, NGOs) from 16 countries, who brainstormed on ways to improve the interaction between research/academia, extension services and farmers, and promote public-private partnerships, to consolidate collaborative policies and governance.

WP6. Outreach and Communication: A dissemination plan and communication kit (logo, brochure, flyer, etc.) were prepared to identify key messages and relevant channels, and ensure a coordinated communication towards all stakeholders. The materials used are diverse: website, Facebook page, online Newsletters, videos, a Cube of Knowledge, research projects brochures, roll-ups of the YRS, etc. A flyer presenting our achievements is being designed and the project's closing conference is under preparation.

Expected final results and their potential impact and use (including the socio-economic impact and the wider societal implications of the project so far)

The ARIMNet2 project achieves the following impacts:

- Impact on regional agricultural R&I by exchanging and sharing information, knowledge and good practices.
- Impact on the competitiveness of Mediterranean agriculture by fostering complementarities between national research programmes, ensuring a more comprehensive way to address key issues faced by Mediterranean agriculture and by providing more accurate responses to common challenges.
- Impact on national programmes through the development of a common insight into their content and management; the exchange of good practices in terms of governance; the development of common approaches and common standards; planning and funding of transnational activities.
- Impact on stakeholders and public awareness by developing a common understanding of strategic issues and a shared vision of Mediterranean agricultural research (objectives, priorities, instruments).
- Impact on other EU-funded ongoing or future projects and initiatives, in terms of synergies and collaboration, and on the Euro-Mediterranean R&I Partnership.

ARIMNet2 website: <http://www.arimnet2.net>

ARIMNet2 (2014-2017) is an ERA-NET coordinated by INRA (France). It has received funding from the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme for research, technological development and demonstration under grant agreement no. 618127