



Reframing and Expanding AKIS in Italy to Reach Women Innovators

Policy Brief Italy

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Women farmers and entrepreneurs leading environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable innovations often remain outside the reach of the Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS), in Italy just like in other European countries. Reframing and expanding AKIS could help better support inclusive innovation in farming and rural development.

Executive Summary

The Agriculture and Knowledge Systems (AKIS) in Italy needs to reach a wider group of farmers, rural entrepreneurs and food producers. Evidence from the FLIARA project shows that female innovators in farming and rural areas are a target group that currently are often not aware of AKIS or does not believe it could be relevant for them. In particular, women leading projects focusing on organic, biodynamic or regenerative farming are identified as a group in need of more support.

The Italian CAP Strategic Plan includes the description of the nationally defined AKIS strategy and emphasises the importance of the regional dimension. In 2024, the National AKIS Coordination (CN-AKIS) has been officially established in Italy: a new body composed of 18 experts in AKIS and digitalization of the agricultural sector. At Regional level AKIS Coordination Bodies have been established. In this regard, the Italian AKIS Coordination Bodies should make an explicit effort to reach out to women innovators working in agriculture and food production. Activities and actions specifically targeting women should also be planned. The presence of women in AKIS bodies should be increased, also favouring the participation of female agricultural and rural women representatives.



The Challenge

Women farmers and rural entrepreneurs interviewed in the context of the FLIARA project in Italy, just like in many other European countries, argued that they are not aware of AKIS and that in general they feel that there is a lack of support for environmental, social and economic innovations, especially in small-scale organic farming, food production and businesses. AKIS should consider women needs.

Policy Solutions

We propose to:

- 👤 Frame the AKIS program's communication to emphasize its support for a wide range of innovation projects—not just conventional large-scale farming, but also small-scale, alternative approaches such as organic, biodynamic, and regenerative agriculture, as well as sustainable food production; and to reach women innovators in farming and food production specifically. Women's agricultural associations, as well as associations of female producers (there are several for example Associazione Nazionale Donne dell'Olio, Associazione nazionale Le Donne del Vino, etc.) could play a strategic role in communicating the AKIS programme.
- 👤 Training for farmers should be organized considering women needs, also in terms of work-life balance.
- 👤 Support pilot actions and innovation testing promoted by women on sustainable farming and food production as well as on sustainability education (for both children and adults) to foster long-term sustainable rural lifestyles and cultivate deeper sustainability awareness, while also fostering gender equality.
- 👤 Ensure gender balance within AKIS actors involved in the regional and national coordination bodies to ensure that women needs are considered.

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Supporting Evidence

The FLIARA project, both from Italy and the other partner countries, indicates that AKIS is not well known among women farmers and other rural entrepreneurs. The role of AKIS in supporting women in farming still remains very marginal, with the vast majority of women across countries being unsure or totally unfamiliar with the concepts or practices of AKIS. (Roos, Sivini, et al, 2025).

Case studies from Italy revealed that female farm and rural innovators were unaware of AKIS, despite the fact that many of their innovation initiatives align closely with AKIS's current focus and objectives. In Italy, none of the 20 women innovators interviewed mentioned AKIS. (Sivini, Roos & Leonardelli, 2024). This highlights a disconnect between the program's outreach and the communities it aims to serve.



Conclusion & Call to Action

FLIARA data indicates that AKIS is not reaching farmers and entrepreneurs as broadly as intended. A strategic re-launch of AKIS, could better address the needs of female innovators in agriculture and rural areas, particularly those involved in organic farming and sustainable food production.

Call to Action:

- Information about AKIS should be widely improved throughout the country, through regional communication and specific campaigns to reach small-scale farmers practicing sustainable agriculture, and especially female innovators.
- Emphasize that the AKIS program supports a broad spectrum of innovations—not only AI and high-tech solutions for large-scale conventional farming, but also social, environmental, and grassroots innovations relevant to diverse farming and food production models.
- AKIS should promote specific actions to support women innovators, from gathering their needs to providing support.
- Increase the presence of women in AKIS bodies by involving female representatives, e.g. from women's agricultural associations and producer associations.

Further Reading

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[AKIS National Coordination](#), accessed 27 August 2025

Cristiano S., Carta V., Proietti P., Lasorella M.V., Tudino L., Costantini G., Lai M. (2024), *[AKIS and advisory services in Italy. Updated report for the AKIS inventory \(Task 1.2\) of the i2connect project](https://meteodocs.llkc.lv/index.php/s/csFcQJc6r7NacJd#pdfviewer)*, <https://meteodocs.llkc.lv/index.php/s/csFcQJc6r7NacJd#pdfviewer> , accessed 27 August 2025

Sivini, S., Roos, A. & Leonardelli, I. (2024). *D.3.3. Women-led Innovations in Agriculture and Rural Areas, Lessons Learned Report and Fact Sheets on Female Innovations*. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14045390>, accessed 27 August 2025

Roos, A., Sivini, S., Alexandersson A., Leonardelli I., Farrell, M. (2025), *D.3.4. Comparative analysis Report*

About FLIARA

The project is on a mission to create a more sustainable future by highlighting the role of women in agriculture and rural areas. FLIARA will boost understanding of the needs and challenges facing women leading innovative environmental and rural development practices in EU farming and rural areas.

Contact

Email: info@fliara.eu

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