



GOVERNMENT
OF MALTA



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GUIDANCE NOTES

Knowledge Exchange and Dissemination of Information: Support for the use of Advisory Services (Business Plans) Intervention 78.2.1

COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY STRATEGIC PLAN
(MALTA) 2023 - 2027

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Version 1.0

MANAGING AUTHORITY (CAP SP)

The Oaks Business Centre, Block B, Triq Farsons,
Hamrun HMR 1321, Malta
Telephone: (+)356 2555 2555
Email: fondi.eu@gov.mt



The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development:
Europe investing in rural areas

Disclaimer

The Managing Authority reserves the right, in particular on the basis of approval or direction by the European Commission, to amend from time-to-time certain provisions established by this guidance document.

In case of any conflicts between these guidelines and the text of the Common Agricultural Policy Strategic Plan (CAP SP) 2023 - 2027 and other legislative text, the interpretation given by the CAP SP and relevant legislation will be given priority.

The English version will be the legally binding text.

The Managing Authority also reserves the right to request additional information not included in this Guidance Document, in order to proceed with checks and evaluation of the application throughout the process.

This document supersedes any previous guidance notes, website notifications or other media notification issued on this Intervention prior to the launch of this call. Other notifications can be issued on such platforms following the issue of this call.

Further details on the application process may be published in due course on the websites of the Managing Authority <https://fondi.eu/> . For more information, the Managing Authority can be contacted by email at communications.eufunds@gov.mt or (+)356 2555 2605 during office hours.

Notices

HISTORY OF CHANGES		
Version	Publication Date	Change
1	21/10/2024	Publication of first version of calls

Procedure for the submission of applications

- Applications are to be sent by email on rdsubmissions.opm-ees@gov.mt
- Applicants are to ensure to submit their application before noon (12pm Central European Time) of the indicated closing date.
- If Application and supporting documentation exceeds 20MB, please split the files in separate zipped folders and send in separate emails (***e.g. Intervention ****Joe Borg - Part 2 of 3***)
- The MA remains available to confirm with applicants that an application has been received if contacted via email on rdsubmissions.opm-ees@gov.mt or via Tel. 2555 2605 during office hours. The MA will also issue an acknowledgement letter.
- Note that the automated acknowledgement sent from the RDD mailbox does not in any way confirm or otherwise the (a) successful receipt of part or full application, nor, (b) that the application is deemed admissible.
- The applicants will be advised further, during the evaluation process, with regards to the submission of any necessary clarifications/documents required
- The Managing Authority reserves the right, in particular on the basis of approval or direction by the European Commission, to amend from time-to-time certain provisions established by this guidance document. Such amendments may become applicable and enforced retrospectively.
- In case of any conflicts between these guidelines and the text of the CAP SP and other legislative text, the interpretation given by the relevant legislation and the CAP SP will be given priority. The English version will be the legally binding text.
- The Project Selection Committee reserves the right to request additional information not included in this Guidance Document.

- Applications in hard copy, whether submitted by mail, by hand or any other means, will not be accepted and in this case, the application will not be deemed admissible and hence will not be considered during the evaluation process. Pen-drives and CDs etc are not required and will not be accepted. This applies to submissions at both the Front Offices in Malta and Gozo as well as the Managing Authority Offices in Hamrun.

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Definitions

CAP: Common Agricultural Policy is a commitment that the EU is promoting amongst its Member States to ensure a stable supply of food, safeguards farmers' income and protects the environment, while keeping rural areas vibrant.

CSP: Common Agricultural Policy – Strategic Plan is a plan drawn up by each Member State to contribute towards reaching the aims of the Common Agricultural Policy. CAP Strategic Plans encourage the transition towards a smart, sustainable, competitive, resilient, and diversified agricultural sector, while ensuring long-term food security.

CSP Regulation: Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing rules on support for strategic plans to be drawn up by Member States under the common agricultural policy (CAP Strategic Plans) and financed by the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF) and by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and repealing Regulations (EU) No 1305/2013 and (EU) No 1307/2013 and REGULATION (EU) 2021/2116 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 2 December 2021 on the financing, management and monitoring of the common agricultural policy and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1306/2013.

CPR: (where applicable) Common Provision Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Cohesion Fund, the Just Transition Fund and the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and financial rules for those and for the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Internal Security Fund and the Instrument for Financial Support for Border Management and Visa Policy.

Checks and controls: Provide a means of verification that the investment operation complies with, and is in conformity to, the relevant rules and regulations.

Contact Person: A person that is authorised by the applicant and can be contacted directly for matters in connection with the application and eventually the project.

CRRB: Change Request Review Board

EAFRD: European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development.

Evaluation: A periodic collection and analysis of evidence to form conclusions on the effectiveness and efficiency of interventions.

Grant Agreement (GA): An agreement signed between the MA and the selected applicant (beneficiary) containing provisions and conditions related to the particular support being given.

Grant Award Letter: A letter sent by the MA to selected applicants upon the completion of the selection process in order to inform applicants of its outcome. The award letter can include certain conditions and actions expected on the part of the applicant.

Land Registration Identification System (LPIS): The system contains all agricultural areas, registered at the Front Office (ARPA) that may be eligible for a land-based measure under the Common Agricultural Policy.

Intervention: There are two types of interventions - those related to land (e.g. practices on agricultural land) or through investments (e.g. investing in the infrastructure of a farm, or buying equipment for the processing of agricultural products).

Managing Authority: A national or regional body designated by a Member State to manage and implement the CAP Strategic Plan.

Monitoring: Regular examination of the resources, outputs, and results of interventions.

Paying Agency: The Agriculture and Rural Payments Agency (ARPA) within the Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries and Animal Rights (MAFA).

Project Leader: Is a person who is authorised by the applicant to ensure a project is carried through and in line with commitments. The Project Leader can be contacted directly for matters relative to an on-going project and is expected to have responsibility for the execution of a project.

Project Selection Committee (PSC): An independent Committee that assesses and ranks project proposals (applications).

Project Selection Appeals Board (PSAB): An independent Committee that assesses any appeal submissions.

Results: The direct effects or changes that arise due to the intervention.

Simplified Cost Options (SCOs): Expenditure which is reimbursed according to predefined methods (translated into amounts/percentages) based on processes, outputs or results representing the best approximation of real costs incurred when implementing an action.

FAS: Farm Advisory Service.

FASRB: Farm Advisory Service Registration Board Farm Advisory Service Provider (SP): an entity or body intended to provide advice to farmers which has been officially recognized by the FASRB as per L.N. 99 of 2019 as amended by L.N. 189 of 2024 which gives the legal basis for the setting up of Farm Advisory Service farm advisory service providers and contracted by the MA.

Setting up of young farmers: CAP SP Intervention: 75.1 '*Setting up of young farmers*'.

1. Introduction

These Guidance Notes are intended to assist Applicants understand the requirements for requesting and receiving funding support under **78.2.1: Knowledge exchange and dissemination of information: Support for the use of Advice (Business Plans)**.

Applicants are advised to familiarise themselves with these Guidance Notes prior to completing an application. The Guidance Notes, Application Form and all Annexes and other documentation are available at www.fondi.eu during the application period.

1.1. Authorities

The Funds and Programmes Division (FPD) within the Ministry responsible for EU Funds is the Managing Authority (MA) responsible for managing the interventions of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development Fund (EAFRD) in accordance with the Common Agricultural Policy – Strategic Plan for the 2023-2027 programming period.

The Paying Agency (PA) is the Agriculture and Rural Payments Agency (ARPA) within the Ministry responsible for agriculture.

Other national authorities may be involved and referred to in the assessment of an application, or during project implementation.

1.2. Scope & Objectives

The Scope of farm advisory services is to provide appropriate assistance to farmers, including young prospective farmers, along the cycle of the farm; the setting-up for the first time and process and systems review of agricultural holdings.

This specific call will be limited to Business plans targeting young farmers/individuals setting up as head of holdings and also process and systems review of agricultural holdings. The latter is not limited to young farmers.

Whilst not obligatory, Business Plans submitted for young farmers/individuals setting up as head of holdings can be submitted for the scope of the CAP SP Intervention: 75.1 ‘Setting up of young farmers’ as required by Regulation 2021/2115 Art75.

The beneficiaries that will be receiving the funds will be recognised as per L.N. 99 of 2019 as amended by L.N. 189 of 2024 which gives the legal basis for the setting up of Farm Advisory Service farm advisory service providers who will be compiling business plans for current or prospective farmers.

1.3. Regulatory Framework

The following is the relevant legal basis for CAP SP Interventions

- a. The Common Agricultural Policy Strategic Plan that provides support from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development
- b. Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 2 December 2021 establishing rules on support for strategic plans to be drawn up by Member States under the common agricultural policy (CAP Strategic Plans) and financed by the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF) and by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and repealing Regulations (EU) No 1305/2013 and (EU) No 1307/2013;
- c. Regulation (EU) 2021/2116 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 2 December 2021 on the financing, management and monitoring of the common agricultural policy and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1306/2013;
- d. Regulation (EU) 2021/2117 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 2 December 2021 amending Regulations (EU) No 1308/2013 establishing a common organisation of the markets in agricultural products, (EU) No 1151/2012 on quality schemes for agricultural products and foodstuffs, (EU) No 251/2014 on the definition, description, presentation, labelling and the protection of geographical indicators of aromatised wine products and (EU) No 228/2013 laying down specific interventions for agriculture in the outermost regions of the Union
- e. Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Cohesion Fund, the Just Transition Fund and the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and financial rules for those and for the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Internal Security Fund and the Instrument for Financial Support for Border Management and Visa Policy;
- f. Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2022/1475 of 6 September 2022 laying down detailed rules for implementation of Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards the evaluation of the CAP Strategic Plans and the provision of information for monitoring and evaluation;
- g. Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 July 2018 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union, amending Regulations (EU) No 1296/2013, (EU) No 1301/2013, (EU) No 1303/2013, (EU) No 1304/2013, (EU) No 1309/2013, (EU) No 1316/2013, (EU) No 223/2014, (EU) No 283/2014, and Decision No 541/2014/EU and repealing Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 966/2012
- h. Environment Protection Act (CAP 549 of the Laws of Malta);
- i. L.N. 99 of 2019 as amended by L.N. 189 of 2024 gives the legal basis for the setting up of Farm Advisory Service.

The above list is not exhaustive and may be amended. It is up to the applicant to ensure that all national and EU rules are being followed at all times.

1.4. Contribution towards the CSP Objectives

This intervention contributes to:

- **Specific Objective 2:** Enhance market orientation and increase farm competitiveness, both in the short and long term, including greater focus on research, technology and digitalisation;

- **Specific Objective 4:** Contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation, including by reducing greenhouse gas emission and enhancing carbon sequestration, as well as promote sustainable energy;
- **Specific Objective 5:** Foster sustainable development and efficient management of natural resources such as water, soil and air, including by reducing chemical dependency;
- **Specific Objective 6:** Contribute to halting and reversing biodiversity loss, enhance ecosystem services and preserve habitats and landscapes;
- **Specific Objective 7:** Attract and sustain young farmers and facilitate business development in rural areas;
- **Specific Objective 9:** Attract and sustain young farmers and other new farmers and facilitate sustainable business development in rural areas;
- **XCO Cross-cutting objective:** modernising the sector by fostering and sharing of knowledge, innovation and digitalisation in agriculture and rural areas, and encouraging their uptake.

Needs addressed by the intervention:

Code	Description
2.1	Build human, social and institutional capital through investment in knowledge, training, advice.
2.3	Increase direct selling, adding value, improving processing, marketing facilities and skills.
4.5	Knowledge exchange, training and advice to help reduce, reuse and recycle resources on farms
4.6	Research, innovation and demonstration aimed at moving towards low carbon agriculture
4.7	Knowledge exchange, training, advice and investment support to improve farm climate change
5.6	Demonstrate the value to farm profitability of crops and livestock produced to higher standards
5.7	Identify ways to reduce nutrient loading to air, soil and water from agricultural activity
6.2	Knowledge exchange, training, advice and investment support to improve farm climate change
6.3	Promote the removal of invasive alien species and the planting of native and archaeophytic species
7.2	Provide training, advice, mentoring and assistance for young farmers
9.1	Foster higher animal welfare standards to ensure well being among farmed animals
9.2	Introduce new measures aimed at reducing, reusing and recycling food waste along the supply chain
9.3	Promote products produced to higher standards for environmental and animal welfare
XCO.2	Ensuring that other SO's integrate knowledge exchange, advice, training and information provision.

Result Indicators addressed by the intervention:

R.1: Number of persons benefitting from advice, training, knowledge exchange, or participating in European Innovation Partnership (EIP) operational groups supported by the CAP in order to enhance sustainable economic, social, environmental, climate and resource efficiency performance.
R.2 Number of advisors receiving support to be integrated within Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS)
R 28: Number of persons benefitting from advice, training, knowledge exchange, or participating in European Innovation Partnership (EIP) operational groups supported by the CAP related to environmental or climate-related performance

1.5. Duration

This Batch of applications shall close on Monday 16th December 2024, at noon (1200hrs Central European Time) subject to availability of funds and/or notifications by the MA informing otherwise.

1.6. Budget

The overall indicative budget available for the intervention is €1,500,000 in total (public expenditure). The MA reserves the right to amend the budget allocated.

1.7. Maximum Grant Value and Aid Intensity

Subject to State Aid rules that may be applicable depending on the type of activity, as further outlined in Section 1.8 below, no particular limit is being applied to the maximum grant value that may be requested by the applicant.

This intervention will finance 100% of the eligible costs. There is no capping applicable under this call.

This is nevertheless subject **to the limitations and thresholds of the applicable State aid rules**, in those cases where **assistance would constitute State Aid due to the type of activity concerned**.

- State aid rules do not apply for those interventions that fall within the scope of Article 42 TFEU, i.e. for operations related to Annex I products (inputs) and which also result in Annex I products (outputs).
- No State aid implications will arise in the case of public entities that do not carry out an economic activity within the meaning of Article 107 TFEU.

- In case of services linked to non-Annex I products (output), aid will be granted in line with the general de Minimis Regulation¹.

1.8.State Aid Rules and Obligations

The State aid component of this intervention will be implemented in line with the terms and conditions of Commission Regulation EU 2023/2831 of 13 December 2023 on the application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union to *de minimis* aid (OJ L, 2023/2831, 15.12.2023) (the *de minimis* Regulation).

The *de minimis* Regulation stipulates that **a single undertaking cannot receive more than €300,000 in *de minimis* aid over 3 years**, including *de minimis* aid received and/or applied for from schemes offered by entities other than the Managing Authority. The three-year period is assessed on a rolling basis.

This Regulation applies to aid granted to undertakings in all sectors, with the exception of:

- i. Aid granted to undertakings active in the primary production of fishery and aquaculture products.
- ii. Aid granted to undertakings active in the processing and marketing of fishery and aquaculture products, where the amount of the aid is fixed on the basis of price or quantity of products purchased or put on the market.
- iii. Aid granted to undertakings active in the primary production of agricultural products.
- iv. Aid granted to undertakings active in the processing and marketing of agricultural products, in one of the following cases:
 - a. Where the amount of the aid is fixed on the basis of the price or quantity of such products purchased from primary producers or put on the market by the undertakings concerned;
 - b. Where the aid is conditional on being partly or entirely passed on to primary producers.
- v. Aid granted to export-related activities towards third countries or Member States, namely aid directly linked to the quantities exported, the establishment and operation of a distribution network or other current expenditure linked to the export activity.
- vi. Aid contingent upon the use of domestic good and services over imported goods and services.

Where an undertaking is active in the sectors referred to in points (i), (ii), (iii) or (iv) above, and is also active in one or more of the other sectors falling within the scope of the *de minimis* Regulation or has other activities falling within the scope of the *de minimis* Regulation, the *de minimis* Regulation shall apply to aid granted in respect of the latter sectors or activities, provided that the Managing Authority ensures, by relying on appropriate means such as separation of activities or separation of accounts,

¹Commission Regulation (EU) 2023/2831 of 13 December 2023 on the application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU to *de minimis* aid (applicable as from 1st January 2024) [2024 De minimis Regulation OJ.pdf](#)

that the activities in the sectors excluded from the scope of this Regulation do not benefit from the *de minimis* aid granted in accordance with this scheme.

The rules on cumulation of aid as outlined in Article 5 of the *de minimis* Regulation will be respected.

Applicants will be required to submit a signed *de minimis* declaration indicating any *de minimis* aid received and/or applied for during the applicable three-year period.

In line with Article 6(1) of the *de minimis* Regulation, as of 1 January 2026, information on *de minimis* aid granted under this State aid component of the intervention, shall be made publicly available in the central register at national or Union Level.

The Managing Authority shall retain the following records:

- the identification of the beneficiary,
- the aid amount,
- the granting date,
- the aid instrument, and
- the sector involved on the basis of the statistical classification of economic activities in the Union ('NACE classification')

2. Standard Eligibility Conditions

2.1. General eligibility Criteria

The following are the general eligibility criteria to which the application must conform:

- (a) Submitted application is fully completed/filled-in
- (b) Applicant demonstrates that the applicant forms part of (or is the legal representative) the beneficiary/applicant organisation.
- (c) The proposed project will be implemented within the eligible territory.
- (d) Evidence of sufficient financial capacity required to cover the private financial component (where applicable) is provided.
- (e) The proposed project contributes to the targets and objectives of the relevant intervention.
- (f) The proposed project contributes to the specific objectives, needs and results of the programme.

2.2. Eligible actions

Eligible actions under this call will be limited to Business plans targeting young farmers/individuals setting up as head of holdings and also process and systems review of agricultural holdings. The latter is not limited to young farmers.

2.3. Ineligible Actions

Any actions that are not in conformity to applicable environment, planning and agricultural legislation and/or policy and not in line with the scope of this intervention as outlined in Malta's CSP, shall be considered as ineligible for funding.

2.4. Eligible Applicants

The eligible beneficiaries for support under this intervention are advisory Service Providers (SP) recognized as Farm Advisory Services by the Farm Advisory Service Recognition Board (FASRB) in accordance with the Guidelines for the Registration of Farm Advisory Services as per L.N. 99 of 2019 and as amended by L.N. 189 of 2024 and duly registered in the official register held by the Agriculture and Rural Payments Agency.

The MA will consider applicants which at the time of the application are recognised by the FASRB and are listed on their register published on the following website: <https://arpa.gov.mt/en/farm-advisory-system-fas/>

2.5. Eligible Expenditure

Expenditure is considered to be eligible expenditure and therefore eligible for reimbursement only if it has been incurred after an application has been submitted to the Managing Authority and an acknowledgement is issued by the Managing Authority.

- a) The eligible expenditure under this intervention will be business plans which will be financed through the use of simplified cost options in line with Article 83(2)(c) of Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 regulating the use of simplified cost options under the CAP SP. Business plans and/or Process and systems review of agricultural holdings will be claimed in the form of lump sums attached to each report to the amount of EUR 5,000.

The following must be included in the (i) business report and (ii) review respectively:

i. Business reports for young farmers/individuals setting up as head of holding

- Executive Summary
- initial situation of the holding including Business History, Vision & Objectives
- Business Environment
- Business Idea
 - including Current and new proposals;
 - potential business opportunities;

- Business Model including but not limited to:
 - Core strategy;
 - Commercial Networks;
 - Resources required;
 - Revenue Streams;
 - Channels of Distribution;
- Management and Organisation.
- Milestones and targets for the development of the activities of the agricultural holding
- Risk Assessment including risk identification, risk evaluation and risk mitigation.
- Details of the actions, including those related to environmental sustainability and resource efficiency, required for the development of the activities of the agricultural holding, such as investments, training, advice.
- List of proposed investments including description, technical specifications and identification of suppliers.
- Financial Plan, Budgets & Supporting Information.
- Calculating the categorisation of the holding in line with the parameters of L.N 122/2024 (only if required)
- The final product needs to include acknowledgement of support from EU funds.

ii. Process and systems review of agricultural holdings.

- Executive Summary
- Process and Systems Analysis
 - Detailed description of current farm operations including the identification of existing systems
 - Identify challenges and benchmarking of best practices
 - Identification of ongoing systems and challenges
 - Set a baseline to measure the performance of the holding
- Evaluation
 - A detailed analysis of existing performance indicators
 - Detailed Plotting and evaluation of the critical farm processes.
 - Identification of inefficiencies on the holding

- Findings and recommendations
 - The creation of tailored recommendations for each holding to ensure process optimization.
 - Identification of new ways to integrate new technology to improve the productivity of the holding
 - Identification of key training required for personnel on the holding
 - Proposals for improving on the holding
- Financial projections
 - A Cost analysis including input/outputs and identifying ways to reduce costs and increase efficiency of the holding
 - Forecast of income based on production and market trend
- Calculating the categorisation of the holding in line with the parameters of L.N 122/2024 (only if required)
- The final product needs to include acknowledgement of support from EU funds.

- iii. An automatic 7% flat rate of the total direct eligible costs in line with Article 83(2)(c) of Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 and Article 54(a) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060. The budget allocation covered by this automatic flat rate is specifically for overhead costs incurred by any Beneficiary who carries out an EU-funded project. No documentation needs to be provided by applicants in order to be awarded this flat rate.

The list above is not to be considered as non-exhaustive and the MA may update this list from time-to-time. Where in doubt, it is advised to speak to the Managing Authority.

2.6. Exclusions

In the case of assistance which constitutes State aid, no aid will be granted to those applicants engaged in activities specifically excluded from receiving *de minimis* aid under Article 1 of the *de minimis* Regulation.

Farmers seeking repeat identical service as previously offered under this intervention.

3. The Project Proposal

Applications are to be sent by email on rds submissions.opm-ees@gov.mt . For more information on how to submit the application please refer to the Notices section at the beginning of the application.

It is strongly advisable that prior to the preparation and submission of the application, prospective applicants carefully read these Guidance Notes.

More information on each section of the application can be found in the following section.

3.1. Part A: Administrative Part

Project Details: Name your project in a way that it can be easily understood and captures the gist of your project. Must be within 15 words and project duration of the proposed project. To also insert the number of months for implementation of the projects.

Type of Applicant: to choose if private or public entity

Applicant's information: To fill in the details of the applicant and project leader if applicable

Details of the contact person for the application/project implementation: To be filled in if contact person is different than applicant and to choose if this is valid for application stage or project implementation stage. If ticked yes, information of contract person is to be filled in.

3.2. Part B – Technical Description

Type of Action: Applicant is to tick type of action (can be more than 1)

Project Description: Applicant is to provide a brief description of the project.

Project budget : Applicant is to insert the planned number of planned business plans per year. An indirect cost of 7% will be applied on the total eligible costs that will cover any overheads incurred by the Beneficiary.

Selection Criteria: Applicants will be awarded points as per the selection criteria. The maximum points are included in the application next to each section as well how will the marks be awarded according to each specific section. More information on selection criteria can be found in section 4.2 of these guidelines.

Supporting Documentation: A checklist of documents to be submitted with the Application is included with the application. The applicant is to include all necessary documents along with the filled in application Form. The applicants will be advised further, during the evaluation process, with regards to the submission of any necessary clarifications/documents required.

Declarations: The Applicant is requested to read through the statements in the declaration section and confirm that the Applicant will abide with the stipulated declarations. If the information is found to be false or deliberately or otherwise misleading, any EU funds awarded may be withdrawn and any funds paid may be recovered by the ARPA from the Applicant organisation completing this form. These obligations shall be considered binding upon signing of the Grant Agreement if the application is approved for co-financing. If the applicant does not accept all these declarations, the applicant will not be allowed to submit the application. If submitted such application would be considered null and void.

3.3.Contact Details of Competent Authorities

Tax Compliance Certificates can be acquired by contacting the Commissioner for Revenue

Tel: 2296 2755

Email: certificates.cfr@gov.mt

Or

Using the E-ID online services

4. Assessment and selection

4.1. Validation of applications

The Project Selection Committee will undertake a validity check of all applications that are received. Should any documentation that is required be missing from the Application Form, the Project Selection Committee shall notify the Applicant through a notification letter. Any required documents that were missing from the Application Form are to be submitted within the specified period (usually within 5 working days) from the date of the notification letter.

Only complete applications will be considered by the Project Selection Committee. Applications that remain incomplete after the specified notice period has elapsed will be rejected.

Should the applicant wish to re-submit an application, the process is considered a new one. In such cases, the effective application date would be that of the new submission.

4.2. Assessment and Selection of Applications²

Applications for support that pass the validity check will proceed to the next step and shall be assessed according to the eligibility and selection criteria.

Selection criteria are designed to assess the fit and contribution of project proposals with the CAP-SP strategy, its target group and its objectives.

During the assessment and selection process, checks will also be carried out to assess the reasonableness of the cost presented were applicable. The Project Selection Committee may seek clarifications on the costs and specifications presented, issue recertification procedure(s) for missing supporting documentation, reserves the right to peg the grant to an amount that it deems reasonable, and/or reject applications that do not satisfy the identified criteria.

Projects will be ranked according to marks and funds allocated to those projects which obtain the highest marks. In cases of over-demand for funding, other projects which obtain the pass mark, but which are not funded/selected will be placed on a reserve list according to marks obtained and funding offered if and when funds become available.

The Project Selection Committee (PSC) will award marks according to the criteria and rank projects according to the marks obtained. To qualify for selection, the proposal needs to obtain a total of at least 50% of the total marks.

The voting members of the Project Selection Committee shall decide how the project proposal addresses the criteria and assign points according to the following selection criteria:

Selection criteria are designed to assess the fit and contribution of project proposals with the CAP-SP strategy, its target group and its objectives.

Projects will be ranked according to marks and funds allocated to those projects which obtain the highest marks. In cases of over-demand for funding, other projects which obtain the pass mark, but which are not funded/selected will be placed on a reserve list according to marks obtained and funding offered if and when funds become available.

The voting members of the Project Selection Committee shall decide how the project proposal addresses the criteria and assign points according to the following guide:

Assessment			Maximum Points
1.			15

² The applicant shall keep in mind that the information and documentation submitted in the application form shall be used for scoring purposes against this list of criteria and thus it is in the applicants' interest to be comprehensive when providing such information.

	The proposed project addresses the needs as expressed in the specific objectives	The assessment is carried out on the level of needs deemed to be addresses by the project proposal in relation to the Specific Objective under which the intervention is taking place, within the spirit of the CAP-SP (max 15 marks) ≤ 2 needs assessed (5 marks) $> 2 \leq 4$ needs addressed (10 marks) > 4 needs addressed (15 marks)	
2.	Contribution of the project towards the Farm to Form Strategy	Evidence that the project proposal is deemed to contribute towards the Farm to Form Strategy, including, inter alia, the below: (max 15 marks) Ensuring Sustainable Food Production, incl. shift to organic farming <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensuring Food Security - Stimulating sustainable food processing, wholesale, retail, hospitality and food services practices - Promoting sustainable food consumption and facilitating shift to healthy, sustainable diets - Reducing food loss and waste - Combating food fraud along the food supply chain - Research, innovation, technology and investments - Advisory services, data and knowledge sharing, and skills ≤ 2 needs assessed (5 marks) $> 2 \leq 4$ needs addressed (10 marks) > 4 needs addressed (15 marks)	15 Project under €50,000 – Selection Criteria not to be considered.
3.	Potential of the project to enhance/result in (the adoption of) innovation/ use of state-of-the-art technology in the sector/ partnership	The assessment is carried out on the level of potential contribution of the project to enhance/result in: (max 5 marks) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (the adoption of) innovation/ use of state-of-the-art technology in the sector (max 3 marks) • Partnership with other actors (max 2 marks) 	5 Project under €50,000 – Selection Criteria not to be considered.
4.	Contribution towards Results	Contribution towards results (max 5 marks) $< 10\%$ contribution towards one of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - R1 Enhancing performance through knowledge and innovation - R2 Linking advice and knowledge systems - R28 Environmental or climate-related performance through knowledge and innovation – 2 marks $\geq 10\%$ contribution towards one of the following:	15

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - R1 Enhancing performance through knowledge and innovation - R2 Linking advice and knowledge systems - R28 Environmental or climate-related performance through knowledge and innovation – 5 marks) <p>the following sub-criteria will also be taken into account (max 10 marks):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - quality of the project proposals to deliver training, advice, demonstration or information actions, and farm exchanges/visits - competencies of the training provider, where applicable; - the level of integration of advisors in the actions, where applicable. 	
5.	Readiness	<p>Risk associated with the implementation and timeline of the project as proposed by the Applicant. (max 5 marks)</p> <p><u>Sub-Criteria 1:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Planning Permit Approved / No Permits Required (3 marks) (b) Planning Permit Pending Decision (1 mark) (c) Planning Permit Application (if required) no submitted (0 marks) <p><u>Sub-Criteria 2:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (d) Risks identified and mitigated in the proposed are justified (2 marks) 	5
6.	Quality of operation proposal – Clarity & Sequence	<p>Clarity & Sequence – (max 10 marks)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The proposal is not well defined and poorly sequenced. Central ideals are not focused to support the intended outcomes and following the thread of thought. Description appears disconnected. (0 marks) - The central purpose of the proposal is identified and presented in a logical sequence. Ideas are generally focused in a way that supports the desired outcomes and reader is able to follow with little or no difficulty. (5 marks) 	15

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The central purpose of the proposal is clear and supporting ideas are well-focused presented in a logical sequence which flows naturally. Details are relevant and enrich the proposal and are engaging to the audience. (10 marks) <p>Description – (max 5 marks) Adequate description of the purpose of the proposal (as may also be guided through the application process). The consideration shall be proportionate to the level of funding being requested.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Description is poor and provides no understanding to the audience of the activities to be implemented to achieve the intended outcomes (0 marks) - Description is adequately presented that the reader can follow with little or no difficulty (3 marks) - Description is well detailed and is engaging to the audience (5 marks) 	
7.	Sustainability	<p>Evidenced plans towards facilitating increased participation of women, young farmers³, young persons⁴, other minorities, and ensuring Equal Opportunities – (max 5 Marks)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased participation on one of the above = 3 marks • Combination of two or more of the above = 5 marks <p>Actions targeted: (max 15 marks)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Actions that reduce ammonia emissions - Actions that promote animal welfare (interalia proposals that achieve housing systems, and in particular alternative systems for laying hens, free farrowing for sows as well as extended time in group housing for sows and calves (beyond the minimum time required by the EU legislation). - Actions that promote circular economy - actions that target the use of anti-microbials. - Adoption/facilitating the adoption of agricultural practices which are deemed 	20

		<p>as contributing towards enhanced sustainability.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Investments in Renewable Energy and Energy Efficient Systems. - Reduction of nutrient losses, while ensuring no deterioration in soil fertility. - Carbon Capture / Sequestration Potential - Increased capacity of water holding in the landscape by the proposed interventions - Make efficient use of existing legitimate buildings, structures and infrastructure, so as to avoid new development pressures scattered in the countryside. - Restore already degraded land, natural habitats and landscapes where reasonably possible as well as prevent adverse environmental impacts that may arise from indirect and consequential implications of development, such as impacts associated with widening of rural roads, infrastructure, rural tourism, etc; and - improve/restore specific aspects of the environment, including the protection and conservation of the natural/rural environment, including site topography, natural physical features, valleys and watercourses, cliffs/escarpments, old rubble walls, traditional terraced fields, mature trees (e.g. carobs), areas of garrigue(xaghri), maquis or mosaic landscapes (made up of a mix of patches of arable land and patches of garrigue/maquis, and/or characterised by non trivial rock outcrops, etc.). <p>1 action: 5 marks 2 actions: 10 marks 3+ actions: 15 marks</p>	
		Large Projects	90
		Small Projects	70

The selection criteria for all interventions can be accessed at: [FONDI.eu | 2021-2027 Eligibility & Selection: Rules & Criteria - FONDI.eu.](https://fondi.eu/en/2021-2027-eligibility-selection-rules-criteria/)

4.3.Unsuccessful applicants

The MA will inform all applicants about the outcome of the selection process.

4.4. Appeals

Applicants who feel aggrieved by the outcome of the procedure have the right of appeal with the Project Selection Appeals Board (PSAB) within five (5) working days from the date of the letter of rejection by the Project Selection Committee.

The same application (i.e. applications having the same scope) cannot be considered as being under PSAB and PSC consideration concurrently. In such cases, only the application undergoing a PSAB procedure will be under consideration (by the PSAB).

4.5. Letter of Acceptance

The Managing Authority will inform all successful applicants of the decision of acceptance of their project. Scanned copies of the letter shall also be submitted through email. Letters of acceptance may include conditions which have been raised by the PSC which conditions need to be adhered to.

4.6. Grant Agreement

Applicants who have been selected in accordance with the procedure described above, in terms of being eligible and having obtained the necessary scoring for selection, and furthermore, could be allocated the requisite budget for funding, shall be invited to enter into an agreement with the MA by signing the Grant Agreement. Selected applicants that do not come forward to sign the grant agreement within stipulated timeframes will have the award withdrawn.

4.7. Changes

The beneficiary shall undertake every effort to ensure that the project is implemented within the stipulated timelines as defined in the broad project actions, and in line with the relevant EU and National Regulations and administrative procedures.

The Beneficiary shall not strategically change or alter the overall and broad project scope and actions. Significant and strategic changes that alter the scope of the project must be agreed to by the Managing Authority in the Change Request procedure published by the MA. Strategic changes applied to the project that do not bear the MA approval would be done at the applicant's own risk and will be assessed at the payment stage of the project.

In case the beneficiary fails to follow the timelines defined in the Grant Agreement may lead to recoveries of funds by ARPA or termination by the MA.

Projects with a grant value of equal or less than EUR100,000 shall be limited to two (2) change request submissions, including extension requests, whereas projects with a grant value of more than EUR100,000 but less than or equal to EUR200,000 shall be limited to three (3) change request submissions. The limit of change request submissions applies for the entire duration of the project.

For the avoidance of doubt, the limitation is subject to the number of submissions and not the amount of changes requested per submission. Furthermore, the limitation still applies in case the MA rejects the request in part or in its entirety.

In the case where an investment included in the project requires a planning permit and the necessary permit approvals are not obtained in due time as deemed necessary by the MA, the project proposal will be subject to a withdrawal assessment by the MA. This is without prejudice to any other withdrawals that the MA or ARPA may seek in view of project progress impacting timeframes and scope.

The Change Request Form can be downloaded from the Managing Authority website from the following link: http://fondi.eu/important_documentat/earfd-templates/

5. Contractual Obligations

Upon signing the Grant Agreement, the Beneficiary becomes legally bound by certain provisions. The following sections provide information on some aspects of the contractual obligations of the Beneficiary.

The Agriculture and Rural Payments Agency (ARPA) may, from time to time, issue further information and guidance.

5.1. Durability of Investment

Not applicable

5.2. Documentation

Without prejudice to national legislation or practices that require a longer period for the retention of documents, as well as to the rules governing State Aid, where applicable, all supporting documents related to a project supported by the Funds are to be kept, at the appropriate level, in an acceptable format, for at least a 5-year period from 31 December of the year following the submission of the accounts in which the final expenditure of the completed operation is included. A signed inventory, listing any items bought in connection with the project, should be compiled and held on site (where feasible) and this should be made available to the Paying Agency or any other legitimate authority whenever requested. A copy of the inventory can be found on the <https://fondi.eu/> website .

These documents should be kept in the format as indicated by the Managing Authority so that they can be made available as required by the relevant stakeholders including the Programme auditors, the European Commission and the Court of Auditors, etc. unless otherwise decided by the Managing Authority.

5.3. Procurement

Not applicable

5.4. Controls and Penalties

Beneficiaries must note that by signing the Grant Agreement they are agreeing to undertake an obligation for the relevant checks and controls by the respective Authorities including the following:

- a. The Managing Authority (MA) – Funds and Programmes Division (FPD), Ministry for the Economy, European Funds and Lands.
- b. The Paying Agency (PA) – Agriculture and Rural Payments Agency (ARPA), Ministry for Agriculture, Fishing, and Animal Rights (MAFA),
- c. The Certifying Body (CB) – Internal Audit and Investigations Department (IAID), Office of the Prime Minister (OPM),
- d. The National Audit Office (NAO) in view of the fact that public funds are being utilised for the implementation of the investment,
- e. The Audit Services of the European Commission (EC) and the European Court of Auditors (ECA) in view of the fact the investment is benefitting from European Union (EU) funds,
- f. The VAT Department to ensure that VAT Regulations are respected,
- g. And any other national or EU entity which has a legal right to carry out verifications on public funds awarded.

Maltese Authority reserve the right to suspend the disbursement of grant fund or to recover any funds disbursed to the Beneficiary in any of the following circumstances:

- a) Non-compliance with the terms and conditions of the Grant Agreement, including but not limited to failure to achieve operation's objectives, milestones, or financial reporting requirements;
- b) Mismanagement or financial irregularities, including but not limited to unauthorized use of funds, false declarations, or fraudulent activities;
- c) Breach of EU regulations, applicable laws, or any other relevant legal requirements governing the use of EU funds, including the National Eligibility rules, the Manual of procedures, and any specific guidelines issued by national authorities;
- d) Unauthorized expenditure or ineligible costs not in line with the approved operation/budget or outside the scope of the project;
- e) Suspicion of Fraud, Corruption, Conflict of Interest, Double Funding, or any other misconduct that puts at risk the EU financial interest, the fulfilment of the conditions triggering the payment of lump sums, unit costs, or flat rates, including, where required, the achievement of outputs and/or results.
- f) Actual, potential, or perceived reputational harm and/or unwarranted or unfavourable publicity to the Managing Authority, the Government of Malta, national and/or EU institutions, and/or EU funds.

- g) Any other justifiable reason deemed by the Managing Authority to warrant suspension or recovery of funds provided that such actions are consistent with EU regulations and principles.

The following sections are intended as a guide on applicable checks and controls.

5.5. Payment Triggers and Verifications

Administrative checks on applications for support shall ensure the compliance of the operation with applicable obligations established by Union or national law or by the Common Agricultural Policy Strategic Plan.

Following the signature of the Grant Agreement and subject to the eligibility rules of the specific intervention, a Beneficiary may start to submit payment claims to the Paying Agency for processing, verification and ultimately payment authorisation.

Kindly note that the ARPA Payment Guidelines can be accessed on the ARPA website: <https://arpa.gov.mt/>

In case of the Overheads component, Beneficiaries do not need to provide any documents to trigger this payment. All that is required, is to include the allocated amount on the Claim for Reimbursement. Should the Beneficiary fail to carry out a part of the investment that was approved in the Grant Agreement, the Overheads component will be recalculated and paid at 7% of the eligible investment that was found to be in place and operational.

Management Verifications are an essential component in all EU-funded projects in order to ensure compliance with applicable regulations, to promote accountability and transparency, manage risks, monitor performance, maintain sound financial management, meet legal requirements, facilitate accurate reporting, and enhance the overall quality of the project. These verifications are an essential component of the EU funding process, helping to safeguard the proper use of EU funds and the achievement of project objectives.

Payment triggers for this intervention will be based on the following :

Submission of a copy of the completed signed business plan by the advisor who compiled the business plan. The business plan should satisfactorily contain all the minimum requirements requested in *section 2.4 eligible expenditure*.

5.6. Administrative checks on payment claims by the paying agency (ARPA)

Following the signature of the Grant Agreement and subject to the eligibility rules of the specific intervention, a Beneficiary may start to submit payment claims to the Agriculture and Rural Payments Agency (the Agency) for processing, verification and ultimately payment authorisation.

Kindly note that the ARPA Payment Guidelines can be accessed on the ARPA website on <https://arpa.gov.mt/en/>

6. Compliance with Community Policy

Each Grant Agreement will endeavour to preserve the **Horizontal Principles** and respect the fundamental **Human rights** that underpin all EU-funded projects. These principles promote impartiality, openness, and accessibility for individuals with disabilities, fostering inclusiveness and equal opportunities for all participants involved in the projects.

Gender equality is a fundamental aspect of these principles recognizing the importance of empowering all genders to contribute meaningfully to the development and execution of each project.

To foster a **harmonious and sustainable environment** for all, EU-funded projects must abide by the **Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union**, ensuring that the rights and freedom of all EU citizens are respected. Project activities, decisions, and actions must not violate or infringe upon the rights and dignity of individuals or groups, as defined by Maltese and international law, and wherever possible, promote the creation of an equal and just society.

The principle of **sustainable development** is of paramount importance, reflecting our commitment to meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Malta firmly believes in upholding the Union policy on the environment, as stipulated in Article 11 and Article 191 (1) Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. All projects are required to comply with environmental regulations. This includes fully respecting the Union environmental acquis and national legislation pertaining to environmental protection. Projects should aim to avoid or minimize adverse environmental, social, and economic impacts, striving to prevent significant harm to ecosystems, natural resources, cultural heritage, and human health.

In recognition of the crucial role played by **innovation** in driving economic growth and societal progress, this guiding principle is critical and incorporated into Malta's funding framework. By emphasizing and promoting this principle, the aim is to encourage and nurture innovative initiatives that showcase exceptional promise and potential. EU funded projects should aspire to support and promote innovative initiatives that exhibit exceptional potential, thereby ensuring the efficient and effective allocation of EU funds to projects that can truly make a difference in shaping Europe's future.

7. Overarching Commitments

7.1.Data Protection

By submitting the application, the applicant is giving his/her consent to have personal and project details published in line with the obligations in the relevant EU Regulations and other requests by relevant bodies.

Whilst abiding to the provisions set in the Data Protection Act regarding the handling of personal data, the Managing Authority and/or Paying Agency will retain the right to disclose, exchange or request information about any applicant, application, and agreement to or with other organisations or consultants which the Managing Authority and/or Paying Agency consider appropriate for administration, statistical, monitoring, evaluation and dissemination purposes.

7.2. Transparency

Because projects implemented under this Intervention involve expenditure of public money, there is public interest in how the money is spent. In this respect the Managing Authority will ensure that the principle of transparency is fully respected in the implementation of operations under Common Agricultural Policy – Strategic Plan 2023-2027. A list of Beneficiaries who receive payment is published to ensure maximum transparency.

7.3. Monitoring, Evaluation and Dissemination

From time to time, the Managing Authority and/or the Paying Agency, as well as other National and/or EU entities as may be identified by the Managing Authority, may conduct economic, environmental, or other evaluation of the intervention which may involve the beneficiary in surveys/interviews of various types. Managing Authority officials or consultants/evaluators engaged by the Managing Authority may contact beneficiaries as necessary. In applying for support under this intervention the beneficiary is deemed automatically as agreeing to cooperate with or take part in such studies, which are important for reviewing the effectiveness of the intervention as well as evidencing implementation of projects. The MA may also request cooperation from beneficiaries vis-à-vis promotion of the CSP, including use of pictures/videos taken from projects supported through this intervention.

7.4. Conflict of Interest

Checks and balances to ensure that situations that may give rise to actual and/or perceived conflict(s) of interest are vital in order to safeguard the ethical and transparent use of EU funds, fosters fair competition, builds trust, and ensures compliance with legal requirements, ultimately contributing to the success and legitimacy of EU-funded projects.

In line with Article 61 of the Financial Regulation (EU, Eurotom) 2018/1046 of 18th July 2018³, the Ministry responsible for EU Funds, together with ARPA, carry out the necessary verifications to ensure that no conflict of interest arises at any stage of a project's lifecycle. Should a conflict of interest be

³ Financial Regulation (EU, Eurotom) 2018/1046 of 18th July 2018 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union.

detected, the applicant/Beneficiary will be notified to ensure that such instances do not prejudice the EU budget at large. The relevant authorities reserve the right to take any remedial actions that may be deemed necessary in such situations.

7.5. Force Majeure

If a beneficiary has been unable to comply with the obligations as a result of Force Majeure or exceptional circumstances as provided for in article 3 of (EU) 2116/2021 s/he shall retain her/his right to eligible aid up till when the case of Force Majeure or the exceptional circumstance occurred. Cases of Force Majeure and exceptional circumstances shall be notified in writing to the competent authority (ARPA), with relevant evidence to the satisfaction of the competent authority, within fifteen (15) working days from the date on which the beneficiary or the person entitled through him, is in a position to do so. After consultation with the Force Majeure Board, ARPA will decide whether there is a case of force majeure or otherwise according to the parameters of the applicable EU Regulations. Should ARPA deem a case to be affected by a Force Majeure event, the beneficiary may be justified or excused, totally or partially, with respect to some default that there may be. But if the Force Majeure application is rejected, ARPA may seek to recover or withdraw all funds related to this scheme.

Official documentation needs to be submitted together with the Force Majeure application. In case of illness a medical certificate is required and in case of mandatory quarantine, the official notification issued by the Ministry for Health is required, in cases of plant diseases and/or death of trees in the case of vineyards a report must be presented by the Agriculture Directorate or the Plant Protection Directorate (depending on the case). Further information on Force Majeure requests may be accessed from ARPA's website on <https://arpa.gov.mt/en/>

8. Contact Details

For more information regarding this intervention kindly contact the Funds and Programmes Division.

Address: The Oaks Business Centre, Block B, Triq Farsons, Hamrun HMR 1321, Malta

Telephone Number: (+)356 2555 2555

E-mail: rdsubmissions.opm-ees@gov.mt

Website: www.fondi.eu