



GOVERNMENT
OF MALTA



GUIDANCE NOTES

Cooperation Support for Participation in Quality Schemes Intervention 77.1.1

COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY – STRATEGIC PLAN
(MALTA) 2023-2027

17th March 2025
Version 1.0

MANAGING AUTHORITY (CAP-SP)

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European Union

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 website of the Managing Authority <https://fondi.eu/> For more information, the Managing Authority can be contacted by email at fondi.eu@gov.mt or (+)356 2555 2555 during office hours.

Notices

HISTORY OF CHANGES (where applicable)		
Version	Publication Date	Change
1.0	17.03.2025	Publication of first version of calls

FIRST TIME APPLICANTS

First time applicants are required to register with (MAFA) ARPA Front Office in order to create an account. Contact details as follows:

Contact details as follows:

Malta Front Office – Telephone: 22 92 61 48
Front Office
Agriculture and Rural Payments Agency (ARPA)
Pitkali Markets, TA' QALI L/O ATTARD
Malta

Front Office Opening Hours (Malta):
1st October – 15th June: Monday – Friday 07:30 – 15:00
16th June – 30th September: Monday – Friday 07:30 – 12:30

Gozo Front Office – Telephone: 22 15 69 79
Gozo Office
Government Experimental Farm, Mgarr Road, XEWKIIJA
Gozo

Gozo Office Opening Hours:
Monday – Friday: 07:00 – 12:30

APPLICANTS BEING ASSISTED BY A THRID PARTY

It is possible for a 3rd party to assist and applicant with their application. Applicants who make use of such assistance are required to complete the relevant section in the application form.

DEADLINES AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that the application is submitted prior to the set deadline.

Upon receipt of applications, the Managing Authority will not be in a position to validate with applicants whether their submission satisfies the admissibility check to be considered for evaluation. It is the applicant's sole responsibility to ensure the application has been submitted in its entirety. The

Managing Authority remains available to confirm with applicants that an application has been received if contacted via email on fondi.eu@gov.mt or (+)356 2555 2555 during office hours.

THE SUBMISSION OF DOCUMENTATION

Applications are to be sent by email on: rds submissions.opm-ees@gov.mt If Application and supporting documentation exceeds 20MB, please split the files in separate zipped folders and send in separate emails (e.g. Application M2.1 Joe Borg - Part 2 of 3) 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.

All documentation will be submitted through the online application portal (unless the guidelines specifically allow for submissions to be made via email) together with the application, including but not limited to, quotations, bills of quantities, qualifications, tax, etc. All documentation is to specifically state the name of the applicant and not of any other individual/company. This also applies in terms of partnerships, where all the documents must be in the partnership's name.

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.

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Definitions

CAP SP 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.

CAP SP: 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

New participant in quality schemes: New participants will be considered those who have been part of the quality scheme for less than 5 years.

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

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

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.

1.0 Introduction

These Guidance Notes are intended to assist Applicants understand the requirements for requesting and receiving funding support under Intervention 77.1.1 Support for Participation in Quality Schemes, Common Agricultural Policy Strategic Plan 2023-2027.

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

This intervention seeks to assist farmers and others to participate in quality schemes that would result in quality products. It is anticipated that this intervention will benefit farmers who take part in such a scheme, ensuring their products meet the standards established by the quality scheme.

1.3. Regulatory Framework

The following is a list of the applicable Plan and main Regulations:

- 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) 2022/129 of the European Parliament and the Council of 21 December 2021, laying down rules for types of intervention concerning oilseeds, cotton and by-products of wine making under Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 of the European Parliament and of the Council and for the information, publicity and visibility requirements relating to Union support and the CAP Strategic Plans
 - f. 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;
 - g. 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;
 - h. 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;
 - i. Environment Protection Act (CAP 549 of the Laws of Malta);

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

1.4. Contribution towards the CSP Objectives

The most relevant Specific Objectives to which this intervention contributes are:

SO3: to improve farmers' position in the value chain.

SO9: Improve the response of Union agriculture to societal demands on food and health, including high quality, safe, and nutritious food produced in a sustainable way, the reduction of food waste, as well as improving animal welfare and combatting antimicrobial resistances

Needs addressed by the intervention:

Code	Description
3.3	Promote Product Quality National Scheme (PQNS) and branding to influence consumer choice
9.3	Promote products produced to higher standards for environmental and animal welfare

Result Indicators addressed by the intervention:

Code	Description
R10	Share of farms participating in producer groups, producer organisations, local markets, short supply chain circuits and quality schemes supported by the CAP

1.5. Duration

This call shall close on **2nd May 2025** at noon (12:00hrs Central European Time) subject to availability of funds and/or notifications by the MA informing otherwise. The total maximum duration of new participation for farmers under this scheme will be 5 years.

1.6. Budget

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

1.7. Maximum Grant Value & Aid Intensity

This intervention will finance 100% of the eligible costs.

The MA reserves the right to reject an application, including but not limited to cases where funds are not available under the respective intervention. In such instances the MA may consider the creation of a Reserve list of project proposals that are positively considered by the PSC.

1.8. Applicability of State Aid Rules

No State Aid implications apply under this call

2.0 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

This call is open for farmers which are newly participating (Not more than 5 years) in any of the following quality schemes:

- a) EU Protected Geographical Indications, Protected Designations of Origin and Traditional Specialities Guaranteed, can only be granted in respect of products registered in one of the EU registers.
- b) Organic products support is granted for products complying with the conditions of Council Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2018/848.
- c) For spirit drinks bearing a geographical indication according to Regulation (EU) 2019/787, support can only be granted in respect of products registered in the EU register.
- d) The Products of Quality National Scheme set in accordance with the criteria laid down in Article 47 of Regulation (EU) 2022/126
- e) Other voluntary schemes which may be introduced in the CAP SP

2.3. Ineligible Actions

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

2.4. Eligible Applicants

Support under this intervention is available to:

- Farmers (whether natural/legal persons);
- Group of Farmers (including *inter alia* partnerships, cooperatives);
- Groups of producer and producer organisations;

2.5. Eligible Expenditure

The following type of expenditure is considered eligible for the purpose of support:

- a) Cost of certification which comprises charges related to professional analysis and administrative fees, amongst others;
- b) Annual contribution consisting of expenditure on checks required verifying compliance with the specifications of the scheme and the annual fee paid to a competent authority.
- c) The fixed costs include the additional associated expenditure incurred for entering in a quality scheme. This comprises certification costs and annual contributions that are inclusive of administrative fees, and may also include checks required to verify compliance with the specifications of the scheme. In the case of organic products, this intervention may only finance costs of certifications, and annual contributions specified above as the eligible costs.
- d) 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.
- e) The MA reserves the right to utilise the simplified cost option applying standard prices for all actions under this Intervention.

2.6. Ineligible Expenditure

- a) VAT expenses incurred by beneficiaries of EU Funds shall not be eligible for reimbursement or contribution from the EU Funds, except in specific circumstances as outlined in Article 64(1) (c) of the Common Provision Regulation
- b) The purchase of agricultural production rights, payment entitlements, livestock, annual plants, and their planting.
- c) Other costs connected with the leasing contract, such as lessor's margin, interest refinancing costs, and insurance charges.
- d) Publicity and Dissemination which is obligatory by the programme
- e) Project Management Costs
- f) Expenditure/costs linked to interventions that are, at the time of application, directly (i.e. the specific investment) served by a breach notice by respective responsible authorities including the Environment and Resources Authority (ERA) and the Planning Authority (PA).
- g) Contingencies and/or losses made by the Applicant.
- h) Statutory fines and penalties.
- i) In kind contributions.
- j) Ordinary maintenance operations.
- k) Transaction costs.
- l) Costs related to extension of warranty, preventive maintenance, commissioning of works, planning application fees, and insurance charges.

2.7. Specific Provisions

Participation in quality schemes is open to both participation under new and ongoing quality schemes. However, only new beneficiaries can be supported. (new beneficiaries for this intervention will be considered less than 5 years).

Farmers benefitting from the Organic Conversion and Maintenance scheme (land-based scheme) shall not be eligible for support under the organic quality scheme for the same year, to avoid double funding.

2.8. Exclusions

- a. Assistance shall not be granted in contravention of any prohibition or restriction laid down in Regulation (EU) No 1308/2013, even where such prohibitions and restrictions only refer to the Union support provided for in that Regulation.

3.0 The Project Proposal as shall be presented during the application process

Applications are to be sent by email on rdsubmissions.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. Project Details

- **Project Title:** Name your project in a way that it can be easily understood and captures the gist of your project (15 words)
- **Project Duration:** Insert number of years for which aid is being requested

3.2. Applicant's Information

- **Detail of applicant:** To include details of applicant.
- **Details of Project Leader:** To include details of project leader.
- **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 other, information of contract person is to be filled in.

3.3. Project Description

The project description forms an integral part of the Application Form, and all Sections have to be completed by the Applicant for such applications to be eligible under this intervention.

3.4. Budget

Double-click on the table in the application to input details. Total amounts are calculated automatically. In the table below please provide a complete list of items of the proposed project to be co-financed by this Intervention. The expected Beneficiaries under this Call for project proposals are expected to practice the principles of good governance and sound financial management not only during implementation but also at application stage when drafting the proposed budget. The Project Selection Committee reserves the right to request clarifications on the budget presented by each applicant should it be deemed necessary to do so.

3.5. Technical Description

Project Description: This forms an integral part of the Application Form, and all Sections must be completed by the Applicant for such applications to be eligible under this intervention (**Note this section contributes directly to the selection criteria as listed in the application further below in section 4.2).**

1. ***The proposed project addresses the Needs as expressed in the specific objectives (15 marks) :***
The assessment is carried out on the level of Needs deemed to be addressed by the project proposal in relation to the Specific Objective under which the intervention is taking place, within the spirit of the CAP SP (15 marks)
2. ***Contribution of the project towards the Farm to Fork Strategy (15 marks):*** Evidence that the project proposal is deemed to contribute towards the Farm to Fork Strategy, including, inter alia, the below (15 marks) (In case the total project is less than €50,000 than this does not need to be filled in by the applicant and no extra points will be awarded in such cases)
3. ***Potential of the project to enhance/result in (the adoption of) innovation/ use of state-of-the-art technology in the sector/partnership (5 marks):*** (In case the total project is less than €50,000 than this does not need to be filled in by the applicant and no extra points will be awarded in such cases)

3 marks will be granted according to the quality of the application submitted;

2 marks for partnership with other actors will be granted automatically.
4. ***Contribution towards Results (15 marks)*** Since this intervention is tied to result indicators that are as simple unique count, as outlined in section 1.4 in these guidelines, the level of contribution towards the programme result indicators will be considered on a qualitative merit by the project selection committee maintaining a similar logic to other selection criteria.
5. ***Readiness (5marks):*** Readiness refers to project proposals that are in an advanced state of preparedness such as quotations having already been gathered, necessary permits obtained etc.).

Sub Criteria 1: Maximum of 3 marks will be awarded depending on the status of planning and environment permits

Sub criteria 2: Maximum of 2 marks will be awarded according to risks Identified and Mitigated in the Proposal

6. **Quality of operation proposal (15 marks):** This section will be assessed according to the content of application submitted.

7. **Sustainability (20 marks)**

Equal Opportunities: Tick where applicable where the project will facilitate the increased participation of women, young farmers, young persons and/or other minorities, and explain how the project will ensure equal opportunities (5 marks).

Sustainable Development: Applicants are required to demonstrate that they have considered sustainable development areas at all stages of their projects and how contribution will be mainstreamed throughout the projects' aims and operations. Tick the actions that the project will be contributing to (15 marks).

3.6. Supporting Documents

A checklist of documents to be submitted is to be found in the Application Form. The applicants will be advised further, during the evaluation process, with regards to the submission of any necessary clarifications/documents required.

Disclaimer: The submission of an application form and its subsequent acknowledgement does not imply that the application is being automatically accepted and/or rejected. The outcome of the evaluation of any individual application will be communicated to each applicant following an assessment carried out by the Project Selection Committee (PSC).

3.7. 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 Paying Agency from the Applicant completing the application form. These obligations shall be considered binding upon receiving the award 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 form. If submitted, such application would be considered null and void.

3.8. 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

4.0 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 Applications¹

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 is 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:

¹ 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.

Selection criteria

Assessment			Maximum Points
1.	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 ≤ 2 needs assessed (5 marks) $> 2 \leq 4$ needs addressed (10 marks) > 4 needs addressed (15 marks)	15
2.	Contribution of the project towards the Farm to Fork Strategy	Evidence that the project proposal is deemed to contribute towards the Farm to Fork Strategy, including, inter alia, the below: 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.	Innovation/Use-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: (a) The adoption of innovation/use of state-of-the-art technology in the sector (max. 3 marks) (b) Partnership with other actors (max. 2 marks)	5 Project under €50,000 – Selection Criteria not to be considered.
4.		Where the operation contributes towards a result indicator that is a simple unique count at	15

	Contribution towards Results	operational level, the level of contribution towards the programme result indicator will be considered on a qualitative merit by the project selection committee maintaining a similar logic to the above.	
5.	Readiness	<p>Risk associated with the implementation and timeline of the project as proposed by the Applicant.</p> <p><u>Sub-Criteria 1:</u></p> <p>(a) Planning Permit Approved / No Permits Required (3 marks)</p> <p>(b) Planning Permit Pending Decision (1 mark)</p> <p>(c) Planning Permit Application (if required) no submitted (0 marks)</p> <p><u>Sub-Criteria 2:</u></p> <p>(d) Risks identified and mitigated in the proposed are justified (2 marks)</p>	5
6.	Quality of operation proposal – Clarity & Sequence	<p>(a) 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)</p> <p>(b) 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)</p> <p>(c) 6c. 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>	15
7a.	Ensuring equal opportunities – increases participation of women, young, farmers, young persons, other minorities.	<p>(a) Increased participation on one (3 marks)</p> <p>(b) Combination of 2 or more (5 marks)</p>	5
7b.	Sustainable Development Actions	<p>Actions targeted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Actions that reduce ammonia emissions 	15

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Actions that promote animal welfare (inter alia 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 as contributing towards enhanced sustainability. - 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.). 	
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		1 action: 5 marks 2 actions: 10 marks 3+ actions: 15 marks	
		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).

4.3. Unsuccessful Applicants

The MA will inform all applicants about the outcome of the selection process. This notification can be made via email notification.

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 (unless otherwise specified) from the date of the letter of rejection by the Project Selection Committee.

The same application (i.e. applications broadly 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. Notification of Acceptance

The Managing Authority will inform all successful applicants of the decision of acceptance of their project. Letters of acceptance may include conditions which have been raised by the Project Selection Committee 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 of his/her/their own volition. 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, this may lead to recoveries of funds by the Paying Agency or termination by the MA unless an extension is either requested and granted by the MA or granted as an administrative extension 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/

5.0 Contractual Obligations

Upon receiving the award letter, the Beneficiary becomes legally bound by certain provisions. The following sections provide information on some aspects of the contractual obligations of the Beneficiary.

5.1. Procurement

Beneficiaries should note that grants awarded for actions under this Intervention are public funds. In this regard, all beneficiaries should ensure that any procurement undertaken for works/services/supplies to be financed through this intervention is carried out in line with the principles of sound financial management, good governance, transparency, and equality together with the provisions of the Manual of Procedures issued by the relevant authorities.

In cases of non-compliances with the rules of public procurement, the financial corrections towards the beneficiary will be determined by the Paying Agency on the basis of the Commission Decision of 14.5.2019 laying down the guidelines for determining financial corrections C(2019)3452 final.

5.2. Administrative checks on payments 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 Paying Agency for processing, verification and ultimately payment authorisation.

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

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

5.3. Payment Triggers and Management Verifications

In case of the Overheads component, Beneficiaries do not need to provide any documents to trigger this payment. This will be calculated on 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.

5.4. Controls and Penalties

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.

5.5. Documentation

Without prejudice to national legislation or practices that require a longer period for the retention of documents, all supporting documents related to a project supported by the Funds are to be kept by the Paying Agency 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. This documentation will also be available in the IT system managed by the national funding Authorities and 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.

Without prejudice to national legislation or practices that require a longer period for the retention of documents, the beneficiary shall retain the pertinent documentation in either digital or printed format linked to this project for funding purposes.

A signed inventory, listing any items bought in connection with the project, should be compiled and maintained by the beneficiary and this should be made available to the Paying Agency, or any other legitimate authority whenever requested. An inventory template can be found on the www.fondi.eu website under the Templates section.

5.6. Durability of Investment

Durability is not applicable for this call.

5.7. Responsible Entities

Checks and controls can be done by any of the following authorities:

- a. The Managing Authority (MA) – Funds and Programme Division (FPD), within the Ministry responsible for EU funds
- b. The Paying Agency (PA) – Agriculture and Rural Payments Agency (ARPA), Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries 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.

6.0 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.

7.0 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 are awarded a grant and separately, those who receive payment are 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 CAP SP, 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 2018², the Ministry responsible for EU Funds, together with ARPA, carry out the necessary verifications to ensure

² Financial Regulation (EU, Eurotom) 2018/1046 of 18th July 2018 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union.

that no conflict of interest arises at any stage of a project's lifecycle. Should a conflict of interest be 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 was 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, the Maltese Authorities 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/>

8.0 Contact Details

For more information regarding this intervention, kindly contact the Managing Authority through the following contact information and by referring specifically to this Intervention.

Telephone Number: (+)356 2555 2555

E-mail: fondi.eu@gov.mt

Website: www.fondi.eu