



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft  
Confédération suisse  
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Federal Department of Economic Affairs,  
Education and Research EAER

**State Secretariat for Economic Affairs SECO**  
and  
**Federal Office for Agriculture FOAG**

# Management Response

of the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs SECO

and the

Federal Office for Agriculture FOAG

to the

**Swiss Report on Enhancing Innovation in Rural Regions**

by the

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development OECD

December 2022

## 1. Acknowledgements

The State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (hereafter SECO) and the Federal Office for Agriculture (hereafter FOAG) would like to extend their gratitude to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (hereafter OECD) for considering Switzerland as one of the five country case studies conducted in the project “Enhancing Innovation in Rural Areas” and for the precious recommendations received. SECO and FOAG would also like to thank all the people on federal and cantonal level involved in the country case study.

## 2. Recommendations and Response

In its report "Enhancing Innovation in Rural Regions", the OECD addresses the innovation landscape in Switzerland's rural areas.

Based on existing policies, information received during the online pre-missions and the visit to Switzerland in September 2021, the OECD recommends that SECO and other relevant stakeholders such as FOAG should consider taking action in the following areas:

- Policy design
- Co-ordination
- Enabling conditions: Access to services
- Special focus: Agri-food Innovation

In this Management Response, comments on the recommendations are provided by SECO (Promotion Activities Directorate) for Parts A-C and FOAG for Part D, in consultation with the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI), the Swiss Innovation Agency Innosuisse, the Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN), the Federal Statistical Office (FSO), the Federal Office for Spatial Development (ARE) and the Regional Innovation Systems (RIS).



## A. Recommendations on Policy design:

OECD-Recommendation		Management Response		
SECO should expand the scope and target groups of rural and regional innovation initiatives by:				
A 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Further broadening the <b>scope</b> of innovation programmes beyond purely tech-based innovation.</li></ul>	Agree	Partly agree	Disagree
		<p>Innovation is often understood as being focused on technical innovation. In rural areas in particular, however, it is important to think more broadly about innovation and to focus on specific challenges. Swiss innovation promotion also takes this into account: the New Regional Policy (NRP) has long pursued a broad understanding of innovation and also seeks to promote process innovation in particular. Innosuisse also has a broad understanding and sometimes promotes innovation in products, services and business models, but tends to focus on ‘science-based innovations’, i.e. those in which university knowledge can make a contribution. Innovative practice-oriented projects in tourism in rural regions can also be supported through Innotour (promotion of innovation, cooperation and knowledge building in tourism).</p> <p>For example, this may include social innovation, as well as specific activities for women, young and older professionals and migrants, if they contribute to a region’s economic development and meet the NRP’s eligibility criteria.</p> <p>Further developments in this area are important. SECO therefore agrees with this recommendation and plans, among other things, to further broaden NRP innovation funding in the 2024 - 2031 funding period.</p>		

A 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reinforcing the development of <b>programmes</b> targeted at small firms, start-ups and nascent entrepreneurs in rural places. This includes outreach to regions not typically covered by the current regional innovation systems. Such development can include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The adoption of the OECD Recommendation of the Council on SME and Entrepreneurship Policy (2022)</li> <li>Supporting SMEs by facilitating the adoption of digital technologies, strengthening digital skills and encouraging and supporting under-represented or disadvantaged groups; and keeping in mind the accrued challenges for access to finance and resources for rural regions.</li> <li>Encouraging the expansion and development of initiatives to encourage the <i>creation of new firms</i> that provide diversified services.</li> <li>Encouraging <i>networking</i> events, <i>challenge-based initiatives</i> (such as the Innovation Boosters managed by Innosuisse) and interaction with schools to build the <i>entrepreneurial mindset</i> from an early age.</li> <li>Considering creating programmes to provide <i>specific support</i> to firms run by women and youth.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Agree	Partly agree	Disagree
		<p>The promotion of innovation in small and medium-sized enterprises, support in dealing with digitalisation, support in setting up companies, networking and special support for young people and women are important concerns that Swiss innovation promotion already takes into account and where it also plans further developments in the future. The Regional Innovation Systems (RIS) within the framework of the NRP already cover a large part of Switzerland and thus also rural areas. Linking rural, mountain and border regions to the innovation dynamics of urban centres is at the core of RIS promotion. An extension of individual RIS to further areas is currently being examined in the cantons concerned.</p> <p>SECO has taken note of the OECD <i>Recommendation of the Council on SME and Entrepreneurship Policy</i> and found that a great deal has been implemented. SECO will analyse the recommendations with a focus on SMEs in rural areas and incorporate them into its work as the situation requires.</p> <p>Digitalisation and the strengthening of digital skills is a key theme in the current Dispatch on Promotion Activities 2019-2023, which forms the basis for SME promotion, tourism promotion, New Regional Policy and export and location promotion. This aspect will be strengthened in the Dispatch on Promotion Activities 2024-2027, also in terms of the NRP.</p> <p>The creation of new firms is supported both digitally via the EasyGov.swiss online counter and via specific RIS activities and coaching. Since its launch in 2017, the EasyGov one-stop shop has been continuously expanded and now offers companies over 45 different official processes. The EasyGov offering is to be further expanded in the legislative period 2024-2027.</p>		

		<p>SECO and Innosuisse welcome and promote exchanges between the innovation boosters and the RIS and hold annual networking events to that end.</p> <p>In Switzerland, the education system largely falls under the remit of the cantons, which is why the federal government plays no active role here.</p> <p>The RIS concept 2024+ envisages the promotion of specific activities for women, young and older professionals or migrants if they contribute to a region's economic development and meet the NRP's eligibility criteria. Various cantons have already planned activities in that regard.</p>			
A 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Broadening the selection of <b>coaches and mentors</b> and increase the number and variety of potential coaches to foster interlinkages between sectors to reduce existing silos by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Diversifying qualifications for mentors.</li> <li>Exploring more opportunities for peer-to-peer mentoring and coaching.</li> <li>Supplementing coaches with R&amp;D experience or understanding of Innosuisse programmes, such as those in the Innosuisse network, with those having a background in business development or other areas, and encouraging the up-take of information classes for coaches without knowledge of Innosuisse resources.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<table> <tr> <td>Agree</td><td>Partly agree</td><td>Disagree</td></tr> </table> <p>Well-trained coaches and mentors with skills in the key development areas for companies are vital to the competitiveness of Switzerland and its regions.</p> <p>SECO supports this recommendation. It supports the development of innovations by the RIS and ensures that the coaches complement each other. Measures are already being taken to ensure appropriate development.</p> <p>Within the framework of the NRP, the RIS will continue to be developed in the coming funding period, so companies will receive support through coaching. The needs of SMEs are regularly surveyed and the offerings further developed. Stronger networking between the RIS and the innovation boosters will also help to broaden the range of support on offer.</p>	Agree	Partly agree	Disagree
Agree	Partly agree	Disagree			
A 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increasing the awareness and demand for <b>university-linkages</b> among entrepreneurs, such that research initiatives are not primarily led by the university research. This can involve awareness-raising initiatives and information dissemination through mentoring, counselling and network events and services.</li> </ul>	<table> <tr> <td>Agree</td><td>Partly agree</td><td>Disagree</td></tr> </table> <p>The networking of universities with entrepreneurs and the public sector (triple helix approach) is a key success factor for innovation in companies. In the NRP, the linkage takes place on the one hand within the framework</p>	Agree	Partly agree	Disagree
Agree	Partly agree	Disagree			

		<p>of RIS thematic platforms, and on the other via specific funding projects (e.g. also within the framework of Interreg), in which universities and companies are jointly involved.</p> <p>Furthermore, the RIS can raise awareness about the issue in companies through coaching/mentoring.</p>						
<i>Building a culture of experimentation:</i>								
A 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engaging in <b>collaborative initiatives in physical spaces</b>, such as innovation sandboxes, challenge-based initiatives, Living Labs and experimentation-specific grants that allow innovators to test solutions for the future at local level, mimicking real-life situations. This could greatly benefit from a closer co-ordination with other government bodies such as Innosuisse's Innovation Booster programmes and cantonal and municipal level innovation or development offices. Such initiatives can include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Innovation sandboxes with a narrow, time-limited focus. Based on the outcomes of such experiments, governments can decide whether to adapt policies to encourage the upscaling of such experiments.</li> <li>Challenge-based initiatives that tie funding, mentoring and other opportunities to solving regional priorities (both physical and online).</li> <li>Living Labs with a physical space where individuals may experiment on the development of new products and services, often accompanied by material and in-kind services.</li> <li>Specific grants that allow companies to access physical and digital networks that help them to think outside the box or test prototypes or new services.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<table> <tr> <th>Agree</th><th>Partly agree</th><th>Disagree</th></tr> <tr> <td colspan="3"> <p>Sandboxes and other experimental spaces are important vessels for testing further developments before they are adopted in regular processes. Innovation partners support such approaches and will continue to enable them in the future, as long as they are compatible with legal requirements.</p> <p>SECO and Innosuisse welcome and encourage exchanges between the innovation boosters and the RIS.</p> <p>The RIS concept 2024+ allows for experimental approaches under certain circumstances. In terms of implementation, the partners will determine under which conditions experimental approaches can be used in projects and increased risks taken. At the same time, measures to mitigate these risks will be defined, e.g. iterative project design, systematic learning from failures and empowerment of actors in planning and implementation.</p> <p>Experimental spaces are also made possible more broadly at various levels in regional development. For example, SECO has launched NRP pilot measures for mountain regions for the period 2020-2023. These pilot measures offer broad scope for experimentation (more flexible handling of NRP funding criteria, easy support for project promoters in project preparation, living labs for developing and implementing unconventional ideas,</p> </td></tr> </table>	Agree	Partly agree	Disagree	<p>Sandboxes and other experimental spaces are important vessels for testing further developments before they are adopted in regular processes. Innovation partners support such approaches and will continue to enable them in the future, as long as they are compatible with legal requirements.</p> <p>SECO and Innosuisse welcome and encourage exchanges between the innovation boosters and the RIS.</p> <p>The RIS concept 2024+ allows for experimental approaches under certain circumstances. In terms of implementation, the partners will determine under which conditions experimental approaches can be used in projects and increased risks taken. At the same time, measures to mitigate these risks will be defined, e.g. iterative project design, systematic learning from failures and empowerment of actors in planning and implementation.</p> <p>Experimental spaces are also made possible more broadly at various levels in regional development. For example, SECO has launched NRP pilot measures for mountain regions for the period 2020-2023. These pilot measures offer broad scope for experimentation (more flexible handling of NRP funding criteria, easy support for project promoters in project preparation, living labs for developing and implementing unconventional ideas,</p>		
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		<p>etc.). NRP programmes can include innovative support offers for actors and living labs in their implementation programmes if they want to.</p> <p>Under the model projects for sustainable spatial development (MoVo), eight federal offices are promoting new approaches and methods so that local, regional and cantonal actors are given an incentive to develop solution ideas and test them on the ground.</p> <p>The Council for Spatial Planning, an extra-parliamentary commission that advises the Federal Council and the Federal Administration on spatially relevant matters, and the Advisory Group on Mountain Areas, an expert group appointed by Federal Councillor Guy Parmelin, have explicitly called for such approaches to be examined. Clarifications are under way. In the case of spatial experimental areas, however, the spatial planning and environmental law sets clear guidelines, especially when it comes to construction measures in sensitive areas.</p>		
A 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increasing <b>flexibility and bottom-up solutions</b>, by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Allowing for a certain agility in the programme, giving entrepreneurs the opportunity to bring forward ideas and requests for funding, for example, through an experimentation fund.</li> <li>Adjusting pre-existing programmes to integrate greater lead times, accept incremental advances as programme outcomes or encourage learning from failures.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Agree	Partly agree	Disagree
		<p>SECO is increasing flexibility in terms of supporting projects through the possibility of using experimental approaches envisaged in the RIS concept 2024+. The exact design is still being elaborated.</p> <p>At the same time, SECO is obliged to proceed cautiously as it is making use of taxpayers' money.</p> <p>Bottom-up solutions are and will continue to be very welcome in the NRP.</p>		
A 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promoting <b>public sector innovation</b>, or innovation inside the policy-making process. This can include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The adoption of new policy tools (i.e. open government, foresight and planning tools).</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Agree	Partly agree	Disagree
		<p>Innovation in the public sector is encouraged in different ways.</p>		

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ New methods of re-enforcing the consultation process with non-government actors.</li><li>○ Funds for experimentation pools that can be accessed for testing out new ways of delivering public services before scaling up.</li></ul>	<p>The EasyGov.swiss online counter is a platform that enables companies to carry out administrative procedures simply and efficiently through a single point of contact. Under the Federal Act on the Relief of Businesses from Regulatory Costs (Business Relief Act), which is currently being drafted, the Federal Council is proposing to expand the range of digital public services on EasyGov. When applying federal law, federal and cantonal authorities, as well as external federal and cantonal administrative bodies are to be obliged to make their digital public services accessible to companies via EasyGov. Consultation on the Business Relief Act was concluded in August 2021. The Federal Council's dispatch and parliamentary consultations will follow in the period 2022-2023.</p> <p>Under the National Data Management (NaDB) project, the Federal Council wants to make data management in the public sector simpler and more efficient through the multiple use of data: Individuals and companies should only have to provide certain information to the authorities once. The Federal Statistical Office (FSO) is responsible for implementing the NaDB programme.</p> <p>Switzerland's Open Government Data strategy for the years 2019 to 2023 was adopted by the Federal Council in 2018. This strategy aims to make open and freely usable administrative data available to the public.</p> <p>The federal government also supports projects in which there is room for experimental approaches (MoVo, pilot measure for mountain regions). It is precisely here that the aims lie before scaling up.</p>		
<p><i>Monitoring and Evaluation:</i></p> <p><i>SECO, in collaboration with other federal agencies and cantonal departments, should contribute to monitoring and evaluating innovation programmes in rural regions by:</i></p>				
		Agree	Partly agree	Disagree



A 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reinforcing how <b>monitoring and evaluation</b> practices, such as the existing regional development monitoring, feed into innovation strategies, as is the case in science and technology foresight monitoring in Japan and the monitoring for demographic trends analysis in Korea. This could include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ A central strategic unit of RIS in SECO that works in collaboration with the Federal Statistical Office (FSO) and cantonal offices based on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Access to shared data on RIS and non-RIS catchment areas.</li> <li>– The sharing of results on good practices as part of the regular co-ordination meetings.</li> <li>– The improvement of data-sharing and open data practices, between RIS, cantons and the FSO. Include precautionary measures such as aggregation and confidentiality controls that can help provide information while still respecting privacy regulation.</li> <li>– The implementation of the <i>OECD Recommendation of the Council on Enhancing Access to and Sharing of Data</i> (OECD, 2021) that, for example, recommends adopting and regularly reviewing coherent, flexible and scalable data governance frameworks; and adopting a technology-neutral and agile legal and regulatory environment.</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ Piloting a <b>unified customer relationship management (CRM) system</b>, which would track individuals' access to different services across and between cantons and RIS, and other agencies such as FOAG. This can be incentivised through financial mechanisms, or through the role of a data champion that pilots the benefits of data-sharing and uses data sharing best practices (OECD, 2021) to demonstrate how practical, legal and financial barriers could be overcome. It could provide the following information and measures: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Account for the location (municipality/canton/RIS) of the companies, or the persons, who participate in coaching, information and networking events.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>The development and sharing of regional data is important as a basis for coordinated further development. The agencies responsible for regional development and innovation already work closely with the Federal Statistical Office and regularly exchange information. Among other things, projects are currently under way to produce variables according to different geographical levels (in particular according to the urban-rural gradient) and on the development of basic spatial statistical units, which should enable a more precise analysis of rural areas.</p> <p>The data exchanged is regularly incorporated into the further development of federal policies.</p> <p>Cantons, regions and other actors with links to regional development can commission special evaluations from <i>regiosuisse</i> on the regional-economic development of desired areas and spaces (regional monitoring). In addition, <i>regiosuisse</i> also carries out impact measurements for NRP and Interreg projects. Since 2012, over 30 projects have already been assessed.</p> <p>In addition, SECO has defined impact models with standardised and measurable targets for the NRP, the sustainability concept and the RIS, which have been agreed with the FSC and the RIS network. As of 2028, these will have to be reported separately for the RIS so that they can be compared more easily.</p> <p>There is no political will for a unified CRM and the question of effort and benefit would arise. Resources should primarily be focused on specific implementations.</p> <p>With regard to the NRP, it should be emphasised that the cantons are flexible and can respond to the needs of the region.</p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Account for the number of companies and location of companies referred by the RIS to other innovation promotion agencies (Innosuisse etc.).</li> <li>– Account for the number and location of companies that are referred to coaches / funding agencies in other in other cantons of the RIS, as well as number and location of companies referred to coaches / promotion in other RIS.</li> <li>– Account for number and location of companies that used the individual cantonal antennas (points of entry), and the number of these that have then used i) a service at the corresponding RIS; and ii) a service at another RIS or another innovation promotion agency and the location of these services.</li> <li>– Implementing impact evaluation and monitoring using rigorous measurement procedures that include counterfactuals or randomised control trials.</li> </ul>	
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## B. Recommendations on Co-ordination:

	OECD Recommendation	Management Response		
	<i>SECO, Innosuisse and other Cantonal providers of innovation services should increase co-ordination and coherence between and within agencies to improve outcomes in rural areas by:</i>			
B 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Developing strategic <b>consultations</b> with local partners and academics to provide input into the inter-agency and cantonal working group on rural and regional development. For example, this can be done at the phase of joint elaboration of Innosuisse and RIS strategies, or through a centre-of-government initiative such as was done in the United States in the White House Rural Council.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Reinforce consultation mechanisms with departments in the federal and canton offices in charge of continuous education and upskilling for older workers.</li></ul></li></ul>	Agree	Partly agree	Disagree
		The involvement of various actors in the further development of the strategy is a central principle of Swiss federalism. Cooperation between the various organisations already exists and is being continuously developed.  SECO and SERI welcome the recommendation regarding further training and improving the skills of older employees and will examine possible courses of action.		

B 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increasing horizontal <b>co-ordination</b> efforts with relevant federal, cantonal and RIS agencies. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This includes, for example, efforts to increase rural-proofing and co-ordination with those in the employment, education and spatial development networks, to create a strategy for addressing demographic disparities in age-based and gender-based participation rates in the rural economy.</li> <li>Consider facilitating co-ordination mechanisms through institutionalising the role of regional brokers that act as a co-ordination mechanism between cantonal and public employment partners on cross-cutting issues such as regional skills development and digital skills strategies.</li> <li>Jointly build strategic programmes for rural areas or regions, in particular, programmes between the RIS and FOAG. For example, agricultural policy instruments or programmes such as <i>Projekte zur regionalen Entwicklung</i> (PRE), <i>Förderung von Qualität und Nachhaltigkeit</i> (QuNaV) or resource projects can be complemented by the RIS, Innosuisse and cantonal programmes.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Agree	Partly agree	Disagree
		<p>At federal level, there are various platforms for coordination and cooperation between federal agencies. In the area of innovation promotion, these include the “Federal Innovation Network” led by SERI, in which all federal agencies concerned with innovation topics regularly exchange information and address current issues. In addition, there is an annual exchange between Innosuisse and SECO, in which joint projects such as the Innoday and new areas of cooperation are discussed.</p> <p>In terms of coherent spatial development, the Spatial Planning Conference (SPC) ensures the horizontal coordination of the various sectoral policies and spatially relevant tasks. In the Federal Network for Coherent Urban-Rural Spatial Development (BN KoRE), federal agencies work together on links and implement joint projects. The Federal Network for Spatial Observation ensures regular exchanges on spatial observation topics. Furthermore, the Tripartite Conference (TC) is a central political and strategic body for the promotion of vertical cooperation between communes, cities, cantons and the federal government as well as between urban and rural areas. The TC deals with spatially relevant topics of national interest and contributes to the development of a common agglomeration policy and policy for rural and mountain areas.</p> <p>Coordination and cooperation are continuously cultivated and strengthened in these bodies.</p> <p>An important role is also played by the Regional Management offices, regional development agencies, which are usually not only the regional contact point for the NRP, but also for other funding programmes and initiatives for regional development.</p> <p>RIS services are also open to participants in FOAG projects, provided they meet the relevant criteria.</p>		

B 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fostering <b>policy coherence</b> through rural-urban linkages for innovation across territories, federal agencies, SECO and cantonal offices by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthening the consultation and convening power of the Federal Network on Coherent Urban-Rural Spatial Development to be aware of and assess ongoing co-ordination needs between the Agglomeration Policy, the Policy for Rural and Mountainous Areas, and synergies for sectoral policies.</li> <li>Giving RIS a more prominent role in the promotion of urban-rural partnerships for innovation.</li> <li>Providing incentives to accelerate the adoption of supra-cantonal development strategies.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Agree	Partly agree	Disagree
		<p>The federal government promotes coordinated spatial development so that urban, rural and mountain regions can move forward together. The Spatial Strategy for Switzerland serves as an orientation framework. It is based on the coherent spatial development (KoRE) approach, which aims for coordinated spatial development in mountain regions, rural areas and agglomerations. Coherent spatial development helps to exploit synergies in spatial development and to resolve and avoid potential conflicts. The federal government's various sectoral policies of relevance to spatial development and corresponding policies and activities at cantonal, regional and communal level play an important role in the implementation of coherent spatial development. The agglomeration policy and the policy for rural and mountain areas also make important contributions as cross-cutting policies.</p> <p>KoRE also addresses innovation issues and the RIS will support developments where they make sense. In addition, cross-cantonal development strategies are already covered through the RIS.</p>		

### C. Recommendations on Enabling conditions: Access to services:

	OECD Recommendation	Management Response		
	SECO, with its relevant federal and cantonal partners, should focus on how to reduce administrative complexity and simplify access to services for innovation, especially in rural areas, by:			
C 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Complementing physical entry points with an <i>online one-stop-shop</i> that contains access and details about public innovation support, from RIS, Innosuisse and cantonal offices, making support accessible from anywhere and allowing for the integration of programmes and measures across sectors. This, for example, can be similar to Scotland's Business Gateway programme.</li></ul>	Agree	Partly agree	Disagree
		Innosuisse already has the Innosuisse Guide for its programmes. SECO is currently developing a location promotion guide.		

		<p>A classic one-stop shop is not very realistic in the near future due to Switzerland's federal system. This has already been examined and clearly rejected on previous occasions because many implementations are shaped by cantonal or even communal regulations. Instead, as announced in the overview of innovation policy, a no-wrong-door principle is aimed for, where permeability between the actors and offers is ensured through networking.</p> <p>Furthermore, regiosuisse, in cooperation with four federal offices (SECO, ARE, FOAG and FOEN), has created an interactive tool that lists available funding for projects in the field of regional development.</p>		
C 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Designating an <i>outreach person</i> that contacts rural SMEs directly and speaks to them to inform them about offers, such as those in the Rural Partners Network in the United States, or the Community Futures programme in Canada.</li> </ul>	Agree	Partly agree	Disagree
		<p>There are regional managers in most Swiss regions who have precisely this role, among others. They are supported by the NRP. In some RIS there are also additional coordinators (e.g. the KAM in the RIS Mittelland).</p>		
C 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developing <i>targeted communication and branding strategies</i> and making sure information is shared in rural areas and through channels in the region, such as entrepreneurs who already live in remote places. This can also include developing specific entry events that inform about the offers of RIS.</li> </ul>	Agree	Partly agree	Disagree
		<p>Generating and disseminating knowledge is an important basis for promoting innovation. Various organisations actively play a part; for the NRP, for example, it is regiosuisse, the platform for regional development in Switzerland.</p> <p>In the coming programmes, communication will be intensified and defined in greater detail. The topic of RIS is to be anchored more firmly on the regiosuisse platform.</p>		
C 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Considering further integrating Innosuisse and RIS services by creating shared support roles where more mentors and coaches jointly take on RIS mentoring and Innosuisse counselling.</li> </ul>	Agree	Partly agree	Disagree
		<p>The exchange between Innosuisse mentors and RIS coaches is important. In some RIS, the Innosuisse mentors are employed by the RIS. Due to dif-</p>		

		ferent innovation promotion priorities between the RIS and Innosuisse, systematic integration is difficult to implement, also because of different kinds of expertise. However, coordination between the two remains key.		
	SECO and the RIS can better accommodate regional innovation support to address change from megatrends by:			
C 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Considering establishing an <b>inter-agency monitoring observatory</b> to monitor trends that signal structural change and projected trends within rural regions that feed into innovation strategies. This entity should:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Participate in co-ordination and provide guidance for national and regional innovation strategies and agendas.</li><li>Be composed of partners from regional and local authorities, academic institutes, the FSO, the private sector and social partners.</li><li>Anticipate change and develop strategies for supporting the transition of current firms in rural areas into new business models.</li><li>Encourage adaptability to new market conditions or other global factors such as climate and demographic change, while avoiding over-dependence on traditional industries.</li><li>Monitor challenges for women, youth, migrants and older workers.</li></ul></li></ul>	Agree	Partly agree	Disagree
		<p>Linking data is important. See also recommendation A8 and the related response.</p> <p>Megatrends such as digitalisation and sustainable development are already addressed in the NRP and are also an important topic in the Dispatch on Promotion Activities 2024-2027 and in the RIS concept 2024+.</p> <p>Ongoing further developments are planned with regard to statistical evaluations of megatrends.</p>		
	Demographic change:			
C 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Improving <b>knowledge and data</b> gathering on women- and youth led-innovation and entrepreneurship in rural areas, including by measuring the impact of policies on harder-to-reach populations such as women, older workers and younger workers in the strategy for monitoring and evaluation.</li></ul>	Agree	Partly agree	Disagree
		<p>Certain data are already available, but a more in-depth development of these data is not currently a priority. In the agricultural sector, there is a comprehensive database in the form of the annual agricultural report, especially with regard to women as managers of agricultural enterprises. However, no explicit data is collected on 'entrepreneurship' or 'innovation'. The monitoring study on the situation of Women in Agriculture (2022), which is carried out every ten years (most recently in October 2022), does not contain</p>		

		any data on this either. The FOAG is not planning any specific surveys at present.		
C 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Mainstreaming</b> gender and age diversity requirements into projects and programmes and improving the outreach to these groups.</li></ul>	Agree	Partly agree	Disagree
		Under the new RIS concept 2024+, specific activities for women, young and older professionals and migrants should be able to be better promoted. Some programmes already provide for corresponding developments.		
C 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Setting <b>targets</b> for encouraging entrepreneurship and opportunities for women and other harder-to-reach communities in the NRP through business support measures targeted to different population groups.</li></ul>	Agree	Partly agree	Disagree
		Increased promotion is supported, among other things, through specific RIS measures.		
C 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Establishing a <b>gender and youth strategy</b> within the RIS structure to evaluate how programme policies can better accommodate female and young entrepreneurs and workers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) learning and adult education.</li></ul>	Agree	Partly agree	Disagree
		Under the new RIS concept 2024+, specific activities for women, young and older professionals and migrants should be able to be better promoted. There are no plans for an additional ‘Gender and Youth Strategy’.		
C 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Considering adding corporate succession planning and innovation for succession to the RIS coaching to better cater to rural needs.</li></ul>	Agree	Partly agree	Disagree
		The RIS determine coaching topics based on the demand in the respective region.		
Climate change:				
C 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Adapting RIS coaching to feature <b>business support on innovation for climate change and net-zero emissions targets</b>, including by:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◦ Considering requiring all businesses that receive support for innovations to demonstrate their compatibility with net-zero-emission targets and contributions to climate change.</li></ul></li></ul>	Agree	Partly agree	Disagree
		The importance of sustainability in the implementation of federal policies is continually increasing. In 2021, the Federal Council adopted the 2030 Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS) and an associated action plan. All federal agencies are called on to contribute to the implementation of the SDS		

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Helping firms assess possible climate risks (physical, price, product, regulation) and improve energy and waste efficiency in their businesses and across value chains.</li> <li>○ Supporting firm know-how on building data and monitoring practices for firms focused on emissions and net-zero progress.</li> <li>○ Encouraging good practices on power sourcing from new renewable resources, minimising waste, saving energy, water and materials, and recycling and reusing materials or waste, while offering green products and services.</li> </ul>	<p>and the accompanying objectives through their sectoral policies and instruments.</p> <p>Infrastructures with significant spatial impacts can only be realised after a prior environmental impact assessment. Generally, all projects, and infrastructure projects in particular, are subject to the strict requirements set out in the applicable laws, ordinances, procedures and consultations.</p> <p>In the Dispatch on Promotion Activities 2024-2027, the promotion of sustainable development is one of five overarching goals. Climate protection and adapting to climate change are included as strands of action to achieve this goal. The Dispatch on Promotion Activities 2024-2027 includes, among other things, the New Regional Policy (NRP) and tourism policy, which are particularly relevant for rural areas.</p> <p>SECO has drawn up a concept paper on how the NRP will deal with the issue of sustainable development from the 2024+ funding period. Raising awareness among NRP actors for climate change and measures to tackle it are part of this concept. However, the NRP will continue to give priority to creating sustainable economic prospects and will neither finance purely environmental projects nor become a climate policy steering instrument. However, the social and environmental aspects of sustainability will be emphasised and explicitly addressed more clearly than before. The NRP will also work more actively than before to incorporate the principles of sustainable development into projects. The proactive identification of opportunities for the valorisation and preservation of landscape, biodiversity and building culture in line with the Swiss Landscape Concept is a promising approach.</p> <p>The Federal Office for Spatial Development (ARE) is currently developing a 2030 Agenda toolbox for companies (focus on SMEs). In doing so, ARE is responding to the need of Swiss companies for orientation and support in their efforts to become more sustainable. The toolbox is based on existing principles and processes and is intended to demonstrate the added value of sustainable action for companies in different economic sectors. In addition,</p>
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		companies domiciled and/or active in Switzerland will be made aware of the importance of responsible corporate governance and supported in its implementation. The toolbox is to be completed and published in 2023. This toolbox will make a significant contribution to implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Strategy and 2030 Agenda (SDG 12.6).		
C 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encouraging RIS staff to facilitate <b>networks and dialogue</b> around innovation for climate change, including by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fostering system thinking and collaboration amongst public, not-for-profit actors and businesses.</li> <li>Exploring assessment tools and competitions for climate-friendly innovations.</li> <li>Strategically connecting to other circular economy initiatives and measures being developed in Switzerland. In this context, the RIS could also further leverage learning from the circular economy toolbox, currently under development, through the NRP.</li> <li>Establishing a strong connection to the Innosuisse Innovation Booster “Applied Circular Sustainability.”</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Agree	Partly agree	Disagree
		<p>The circular economy is an important measure that is addressed in the Dispatch on Promotion Activities 2024-2027 and the Sustainability Concept and will be implemented in the next programme period. A practical toolbox for promoting the circular economy in the regions, communes and cities is already available on <a href="#">regiosuisse</a>. Further measures to support NRP actors in identifying and planning circular economy projects are planned.</p> <p>Circular economy projects are also interesting because they can contribute to the sustainability goals of the NRP and thus to the 2030 SDS.</p>		

#### D. Recommendations on Special focus: Agri-food Innovation:

	OECD Recommendation	Management Response		
	<i>To support agricultural innovation the FOAG, in collaboration with SECO, should work on:</i>			
D 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Considering the implementation of R&amp;D and innovation and technology adoption <b>data collection and survey</b> to the agricultural sector, in collaboration with the Swiss FSO and university partners such as the KOF Swiss Economic Institute that conducts innovation surveys on behalf of SECO. Currently, the national R&amp;D survey excludes the agricultural sector.</li></ul>	Agree	Partly agree	Disagree
		So far, high-tech innovation and corresponding technology adoption have mainly been considered a phenomenon of the food industry rather than one of (family) farms. For the future orientation of agricultural policy, fostering know-how and innovation will gain importance. Accordingly, re-assessing		

		data, e.g. by including the agricultural sector in existing surveys, could be considered.		
D 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Re-orienting public expenditures</b> to support agriculture towards investments in innovation systems, covering both knowledge generation and its transfer to the sector, should be made central to agricultural support policies.</li> </ul>	Agree	Partly agree	Disagree
		Agricultural policy in Switzerland has a clear constitutional mandate. Innovation has an important role to play and public support in this area is important. However, to achieve important objectives of Swiss agricultural policy (like the provision of public services such as food security, landscape preservation or decentralised settlement of the countryside), other policy instruments remain key.		
D 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-ordinating and collaborating with the RIS, for example by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>Incorporating</i> offers to support entrepreneurs by the RIS in the agricultural supply chain and ecosystem, supplementing with programmes from the FOAG and the independent cantonal agricultural offices.</li> <li>○ Improving <i>collaboration</i> between RIS, the FOAG and independent cantonal agricultural offices, when offering support and services in: information, consulting, networking, infrastructure and financing between RIS and cantonal agricultural advisory services, some of which offer similar but tailor-made support for farmers, for example, Innovativi Puure.</li> <li>○ Promoting more systematic communication of successful innovation cases from RIS (such as Star'Terre) to improve scaling up and institutional learning.</li> <li>○ Improving <i>systematic knowledge exchange</i> between research, advisory services, education and the needs of farmers, to speed-up innovation and technology adoption: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Consider creating a <i>digital platform for a systematic exchange</i> between research and advisory services, such as those offered by the RIS, that takes into account the needs of the farmer and/or agricultural processing firms, whether these needs are technical, process-related, funding, entrepreneurial or others. This digital platform or</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Agree	Partly agree	Disagree
		<p>In general, we agree with the recommendation to strengthen coordination and collaboration with regional policy and particularly with the RIS. However, there are constitutional limits regarding direct intervention of federal agricultural policy into cantonal domains such as extension services or agricultural education. Specifically</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We agree with strengthening communication of good examples.</li> <li>• We agree with improving collaboration between cantonal agricultural services and RIS. However, OFAG can only provide incentives for such initiatives since these tasks are mainly cantonal domains.</li> <li>• We partially agree with the idea of the creation of a digital platform. Such a platform can reduce transaction costs. Its implementation, however, would mainly be a cantonal task (see above). FOAG, however, could support efforts undertaken by the cantons.</li> <li>• We partially agree with the development of a FOAG-SECO-strategy regarding the coordination of RIS and innovation support by cantonal agricultural offices. As outlined above, such a strategy mainly concerns cantonal domains. SECO and FOAG could, however, incentivise closer cooperation at cantonal levels in the sense of option 3.</li> </ul>		

	<p>website can have two main tabs, one outlining institutional offers and services that farmers can access, the other geared towards knowledge sharing and peer learning for researchers, academics and the like. This online platform can be incorporated as a part of a new structure of supply chain known as “net chains” (a combination of networks and chains). Such a platform would also help outline the knowledge base and analytical tools that are made available and guide decision-making processes, as identified under the monitoring and evaluation recommendations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>Building a FOAG-SECO co-ordination strategy</i> may include one of the following options: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– 1) The FOAG creates a system that mirrors the structure of SECO’s RIS, in consultation and co-ordination with pre-existing efforts.</li> <li>– 2) The FOAG and SECO co-create a national system that incorporates the agri-food subsector into the RIS initiatives. This can be considered an <i>extension of RIS services</i> jointly with the FOAG and the cantonal agricultural advisory services, in rural regions.</li> <li>– 3) Cantonal and regional agricultural advisory services, including on a multi-cantonal level, and RIS work closer together by jointly providing discretionary funds that individuals and associations may apply for to request support from the bottom up, through cantons and their choice of funders. For example, a centralised portal for support and funding available, as outlined previously, could be the platform for this co-ordination.</li> </ul> <p>Under Options 1 to 3, the role of SECO would be to collaborate, co-create and provide access to its network of institutions, mentors, counsellors and advisory services.</p> </li> <li>○ Under the current legal framework, creating <i>systematic networking</i> between all AIS actors that engages both the federal and regional levels including universities, research institutes, agricultural colleges and agricultural offices that provide extension services at the canton level. The FOAG can continue to co-finance multi-actor research and extension</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We agree with the recommendation to increase networking within the AKIS. This is already the case today at an ad-hoc or project level to keep transaction costs at a reasonable level for all stakeholders.</li> </ul> <p>We agree with decentralising research and development, particularly at AGROSCOPE. This recommendation has already been implemented (→ decentral research stations).</p>
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	<p>projects and networking activities. This initiative can be managed at both federal and cantonal levels, as it proposes a collaboration and knowledge sharing of innovations pertaining to agriculture amongst different relevant stakeholders.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Developing initiatives by other institutions such as Agroscope or AGRIDEA to <i>expand efforts to better connect to farmers</i> through already-created publicly available platforms and by integrating the work of their decentralised research stations and insights from their pilot and demonstration projects on different themes.</li> </ul>	
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