



REFOREST

Organisation: Euro-Mediterranean Economists Association (EMEA)



Discussion Policy Paper #3

Advisory Services as Implementation Infrastructure for Agroforestry Transition

Date: June 2026



Funded by the
European Union



UK Research
and Innovation

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 101060635 (REFOREST). Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Research Executive Agency (REA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

UK partners are funded by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) under UK government's Horizon Europe funding guarantee [grant number 10039700].

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1. MOTIVATION/CHALLENGE

Agroforestry (AF) is fundamentally knowledge-intensive and long-term. Its success depends on good design, careful establishment, and ongoing management. Unlike annual cropping systems, AF integrates trees, crops, and livestock within the same production models that may evolve over 10 to 50 years, and because of this long-time frame, decision making carries lasting consequences for productivity, environmental performance, and farm economics.

Across Europe, advisory systems are rarely structured to support integrated land-use systems such as AF. Services remain organised around conventional sectoral models, with agriculture and forestry treated separately. At the same time, there is significant variability across Member States and regions in terms of availability, prices, entry barriers, digital access, and educational capacity. This uneven landscape affects who can access specialised support and under what conditions.

This gap becomes more critical as the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) moves toward stronger performance orientation and results-based environmental schemes. Farmers are now expected to design, implement, document, and justify complex environmental interventions. In this context, advisory services are no longer optional add-ons but a core enabling mechanism. Without institutionalised, accessible, and high-quality advisory provision, performance-based payments risk increasing inequality, administrative burden, and implementation failure rather than accelerating regenerative transition.

The policy discussion paper¹⁴ examines the advisory services conditions required to scale AF within EU policy frameworks. It draws on findings from the ReForest project and complementary external literature to identify the financial, institutional, and methodological constraints that limit the economic uptake of agroforestry, and to clarify the conditions required for AF to function as a viable farm strategy in the post-2027 CAP context.

2. REFOREST EVIDENCE

ReForest findings identify advisory capacity as a critical bottleneck for agroforestry uptake. Deliverable D6.3 shows that only 1 out of 16 respondents across four countries considered current access to personalized agroforestry advice to be sufficient (Staton et al., 2025). While not statistically representative of the EU, the assessment still identifies consistent structural constraints and opportunities:

Technical Scope & Economic Planning	Advisory requirements extend beyond planting guidance. ReForest Living Lab participants reported needing structured support in business modelling, labour planning, surplus management, market positioning, and long-term system optimisation.
Risk Assessment	Risk assessment and financial modelling are insufficiently covered. Many farms lack access to advisory services capable of quantifying establishment costs, delayed returns, and income variability. Limited farmer capacity to pay

¹⁴ As part of the ReForest Policy Discussion series, it aims to support dialogue with panellists, gather targeted input, and help refine priorities ahead of the final Policy Briefs to be released in June.

	for specialised advice reinforces the case for strengthened public or hybrid financing models.
Institutional Design	Farmers need guidance that combines agronomy, forestry, livestock management, biodiversity planning, and long-term economic modelling. In most Member States, advisory systems are not organised around such integrated frameworks. Agroforestry often falls between the agricultural and forestry domains, lacking a clear institutional anchor.
Territorial Coverage	Provision is uneven. In some regions, targeted advisory exists, often linked to specific programmes or innovation projects. In many others, access depends on short-term initiatives or private consultants. Smaller and medium-sized farms face particular financial barriers when specialised advice is available only on a fee basis.
Peer Learning	Demonstration farms and Living Labs build trust, reduce uncertainty, and translate abstract policy objectives into practical knowledge. However, these initiatives remain fragmented and project-based. They cannot substitute for stable, institutionalised advisory infrastructure embedded within Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems.

Table 4: Constraints & Opportunities in Agroforestry Advisory Capacity. Source: Author's Elaboration

The evidence presented above suggests that advisory services should not be viewed simply as a support mechanism for individual farmers. As agricultural policy becomes more focused on environmental performance, climate adaptation, biodiversity outcomes and results-based approaches, advisory capacity becomes part of the infrastructure required to deliver these objectives. Successful implementation depends on system design, financial planning, regulatory compliance, monitoring, market development and long-term management decisions.

In this context, advisory services operate as transition infrastructure. They reduce implementation risk, facilitate knowledge transfer, support compliance and improve the effectiveness of public investment. Without sufficient advisory capacity, even well-designed policy instruments may struggle to achieve their intended outcomes.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW / EXTERNAL SOURCES

3.1 SCIENTIFIC STUDIES

Garcia de Jalon et al. (2018) demonstrate that uncertainty regarding labour requirements, establishment costs, and long-term returns significantly discourages tree integration. Trusted and context-specific advice reduces this uncertainty and increases perceived feasibility.

Tranchina et al. (2024) identify an additional institutional layer. Administrative complexity and policy uncertainty under the CAP create hesitation, especially where tree integration affects land classification, payment eligibility, or compliance obligations. In such cases, farmers require advisory support that combines technical system design with regulatory literacy. Without this dual competence, risk perception increases, and investment decisions are delayed.

Mvula and Prager (2025) reach comparable conclusions in their qualitative study of agroforestry adoption in Scotland. They show that adoption is shaped by perceived behavioural control and institutional clarity. Upfront costs, procedural burden, and ambiguous frameworks reduce farmers' willingness to act. Advisory services, therefore, function as risk-reduction infrastructure rather than merely as technical guidance.

3.2 EURAF POLICY BRIEFINGS

The European Agroforestry Federation (EURAF) highlights inconsistencies in agroforestry definitions, eligibility criteria, and implementation rules across Member States (#15, #22). Such fragmentation increases the need for advisory guidance on compliance, scheme navigation, and strategic positioning within CAP instruments.

In the context of carbon farming and the Carbon Removals Certification Framework, EURAF further stresses the requirement for structured management plans, credible monitoring systems, and robust documentation (#20, #26). This implies expanded advisory capacity in environmental accounting and performance verification. As sustainability reporting and value-chain disclosure obligations expand (#62), farm-level data becomes increasingly relevant for corporate compliance, reinforcing the need for reliable documentation and advisory support.

4. CAP POST-2027 IMPLICATIONS

Under CAP Regulation (EU) 2021/2115, Member States are required to ensure the availability of farm advisory services, and the CAP legal framework provides clear entry points for financing advice through national CAP Strategic Plans. Advisory provision is embedded within the Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) approach, which also covers training, knowledge exchange, and innovation support.

In practice, however, advisory is not automatically free or universally funded. Financing models vary across Member States and commonly rely on partial subsidies, co-financing arrangements, or project-based delivery. Agroforestry-specific advisory is rarely ring-fenced and often depends on national prioritisation, resulting in uneven coverage and limited continuity.

The post-2027 CAP debate may significantly change the role of advisory services. As agricultural policy becomes more focused on environmental performance, climate adaptation and measurable outcomes, advisory services are likely to move beyond a complementary support function and become part of the implementation infrastructure required to deliver these objectives.

If environmental payments become more outcome-based, advisory services will be essential for helping farmers design systems, meet performance thresholds, navigate regulatory requirements and avoid non-compliance. If eco-schemes and agri-environment-climate measures evolve towards more integrated environmental interventions, advisory services will need to support multi-year transition pathways rather than isolated actions. Likewise, if agroforestry is increasingly recognised as a structural land-use transition, advisory services could be bundled with establishment support,

investment measures, and risk-management instruments to reduce implementation risks and improve the effectiveness of public expenditure.

These developments also raise broader questions regarding the future role of Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS). Existing advisory structures were largely developed around specialised agricultural sectors and often lack the interdisciplinary expertise required for integrated land-use systems such as agroforestry. Future advisory models may need to combine agronomy, forestry, livestock management, biodiversity assessment, carbon accounting, financial planning, digital tools and value-chain development within a more integrated framework. This raises important questions regarding advisor training, accreditation, quality assurance and whether Europe should move towards more formal agroforestry advisory competencies or standards.

The transition also has important workforce implications. Scaling agroforestry depends on the availability of professionals capable of supporting planning, implementation, monitoring and long-term management. Future demand is likely to extend beyond traditional farm advisors to include carbon accountants, biodiversity assessors, ecosystem-service specialists, geospatial analysts and sustainability professionals.

Digitalisation adds a further dimension to this challenge. Remote sensing, digital monitoring tools, farm-management platforms and environmental reporting systems can improve access to information and reduce transaction costs, but they do not replace advisory services. Instead, they increase the need for professionals capable of interpreting data, supporting decision-making and helping farmers navigate increasingly complex environmental and reporting requirements. This issue is explored further in the **Discussion Policy Paper #6** on Digitalisation and Decentralised Tools.

These developments also raise questions regarding the most appropriate delivery model. Advisory services may be financed through public systems, private providers, producer organisations, cooperatives or hybrid arrangements that combine public support with private-sector contributions. The challenge is to ensure broad accessibility while maintaining quality, continuity and accountability.

Agroforestry generates public environmental benefits but involves high information costs, implementation complexity and long investment horizons. Individual farmers often cannot finance specialised advisory services independently. This constitutes a market failure. Public co-financing or hybrid delivery models are therefore economically justified as investments in the knowledge infrastructure required to deliver long-term environmental and rural-development objectives.

5. KEY QUESTIONS FOR THE POST-2027 CAP

If advisory services are essential for delivering performance-based environmental policy, should they remain partially subsidised and fragmented, or be recognised as structural delivery infrastructure?

What level of public co-financing is justified when advisory directly enables measurable climate and biodiversity outcomes?

How should agroforestry advisory be organised institutionally?

Should it be embedded within national advisory systems, accredited through EU-level standards, or delivered through hybrid public–private models?

What competency framework would be required, including system design, financial planning, biodiversity literacy, carbon accounting, and value-chain expertise?

How can advisory services move from short-term, project-based interventions to stable, institutionalised provision?

Should performance-based contracts or lifecycle-based advisory models be explored, particularly for long-term systems such as agroforestry?

As environmental schemes become more outcome-oriented, how can advisory support be formally linked to scheme design, monitoring requirements, and transition payments?

Should advisory be bundled with establishment grants or risk management instruments to reduce system failure?

Finally, how can advisory services remain accessible to small and medium farms while maintaining quality and accountability standards?

What hybrid funding arrangements could combine public support, supply-chain contributions, and results-based incentives without increasing administrative burden?

6. APPENDIX 1: REFERENCES AND RELATED DOCUMENTS

ID	Reference or Related Document	Source or Link/Location
1	European Agroforestry Federation (EURAF). (n.d.). Policy Briefings (#15, #20, #22, #26, #62).	https://euraf.net/policy-briefings
2	Mvula, A., Prager, K., & Geris, J. (2025). Some love them, others hate them: Understanding farmers' tree planting decisions in Scotland. <i>People and Nature</i> .	https://doi.org/10.1002/pan3.70110
3	García de Jalón, S., Burgess, P. J., Graves, A., Moreno, G., McAdam, J., Pottier, E., Novak, S., Bondesan, V., Mosquera-Losada, R., Crous-Durán, J., Palma, J. H. N., Paulo, J. A., Oliveira, T. S., Cirou, E., Hannachi, Y., Pantera, A., Wartelle, R., Kay, S., Malignier, N., & Vityi, A. (2018). How is agroforestry perceived in Europe? An assessment of positive and negative aspects by stakeholders. <i>Agroforestry Systems</i> , 92, 829–848.	https://doi.org/10.1007/s10457-017-0116-3
4	Staton, T., et al. (2025). Business Models for Agroforestry Advisory Services (Deliverable D6.3). Horizon Europe Project 101060635 – REFOREST. Public Deliverable.	

5	Tranchina, M., Burgess, P., Cella, F.G. et al. (2024). Exploring agroforestry limiting factors and digitalization perspectives: insights from a European multi-actor appraisal. Agroforest Systems 98, 2499–2515. food systems: A case study from Santa Barbara County, California. Journal of Rural Studies, 35, 26–36.	https://doi.org/10.1007/s10457-024-01047-x
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