

Evaluation of assistance in Agriculture and Rural Development in North Macedonia

Main findings

- EU support catalysed major progress in aligning North Macedonia's agricultural policies with the EU acquis in the Agriculture sector.
- Institutional & Infrastructure gains: Capacity building and Critical Infrastructure.
- Implementation gaps: Weak enforcement, staff turnover, and insufficient national budgets limit the operationalisation of reforms.
- Governance Improvements: Piloted integrated digital tools that, when operationalised, reduce administrative burdens and improve monitoring.

Lessons learnt

- Alignment legislative progress is not enough — support must prioritise operationalisation by beneficiary, including clear enforcement mechanisms, budget allocations, and performance monitoring.
- Digitalisation needs long-term Planning including staffing, legal mandates, maintenance budget and user training.
- Pilots must have scaling pathways as successful pilots stalled post-project due to lack of national funding or institutional anchoring.

Recommendations

- Strengthen enforceability & ownership.
- Institutionalise stakeholder engagement at national level.
- Conditionalise EU support to legal alignment.
- Transition to indirect management gradually and where commitment and capacities are already in place.

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2015 Programme for the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia: Agriculture, Rural Development and Food Safety, Veterinary & Phytosanitary Policy
2019 Programme for the Republic of North Macedonia: EU supports Rural Development and Competitive Sustainable Agriculture for 2019

EU Support for North Macedonia's Farming & Rural Growth (2015 & 2019)

Under IPA II, the European Union invested €27.3 million to help North Macedonia modernise its farming sector, improve food safety, and prepare for EU membership. This support focused on updating laws, training farmers and inspectors, and building key infrastructure like irrigation systems and digital tools for managing procedures, trainings and data collection necessary for evidence based policy decisions.

The EU funded two major programmes to align the country's policies and legislation with EU acquis and EU standards in agriculture, food safety, and rural development. New laws were adopted to match EU rules, including critical updates on food safety, plant health, and farm advisory services. Over 60 legal acts were revised, while digital systems like IACS (for farm subsidies) and IFIS (for forestry management) were upgraded or developed.

Practical improvements included modernising laboratories, border inspection posts, and small-scale irrigation systems covering over 700 hectares of farmland. Farmers received training and grants to form cooperatives, upgrade storage facilities, and access new markets. Land consolidation projects also helped reduce the number of fragmented farm plots, making them easier to manage.

This EU support has laid a strong foundation for North Macedonia's farming sector, but continued investment, both financial and political, will be key to ensuring lasting change. The focus must shift from creating new systems to making them work for farmers, businesses, and consumers across the country.