
THE LEGAL STATUS OF AGRICULTURAL ADVISORY SERVICES IN THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Farm Advisory System (FAS) in the European Union are undergoing significant legal and institutional transformation in response to climate change, digitalization, and the evolving objectives of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). This paper analyses the changing legal position of advisory services within the Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS), with particular emphasis on Regulation (EU) 2021/2115. The study applies a comparative and qualitative approach to examine differences between advanced European Union models and the current regulatory framework of the Republic of Serbia. The findings indicate that Serbian legislation remains predominantly based on a traditional model of knowledge transfer and lacks sufficient digital and institutional integration. The paper argues that harmonization with European Union standards must extend beyond formal legal alignment and include the strengthening of advisory capacities, digital governance, and innovation-oriented support mechanisms. Such reforms are essential for the effective implementation of IPARD III and the sustainable development of rural communities.

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Introduction

In developed societies, particularly during the period of accelerated agricultural modernization following the Second World War, agricultural advisory services were predominantly oriented toward the transfer of technology. While this function remains relevant, contemporary approaches place increasing emphasis on empowering farmers to independently address on-farm challenges, make decisions essential for the viability of their holdings, identify emerging problems, and proactively seek information and solutions from both advisory services and a broader ecosystem of knowledge sources.

Accordingly, advisory services are evolving beyond their traditional role as mere “transmitters of information” toward a farmer-centered, user-oriented model. The focus of advisory practice is shifting from production processes per se to the farmer as a decision-maker, with particular attention to their capacity to assess concrete problems and evaluate alternative solutions within modern agricultural systems, frequently in line with environmental sustainability requirements (Djurić et al., 2019).

Contemporary agriculture increasingly operates as a complex, knowledge-intensive system structured around innovation and regulatory governance. Within this framework, advisory services assume a pivotal intermediary role, linking normative legal frameworks with the practical realities of agricultural production (Jovanić & Đelić, 2013). The concept of the Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS) encapsulates this integrative approach, connecting scientific research, agricultural practice, and public policy. Empirical studies demonstrate that AKIS enhances the efficiency of knowledge and innovation transfer, thereby positioning advisory services at the core of agricultural development processes (Kountios et al., 2024).

Moreover, the notion of micro-AKIS underscores the complexity of localized innovation networks and highlights the necessity of their institutional support. Within this context, advisory services play a central role in disseminating innovation and facilitating the implementation of sustainable practices at the farm level. Strengthening the institutional capacity of AKIS has a direct impact on the resilience and competitiveness of the agricultural sector (Kountios et al., 2024).

In this evolving governance landscape, advisory services are no longer confined to an educational function but emerge as key actors in the implementation of public policies and legal norms. Within the European Union, they form an integral component of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), contributing to the enforcement of legal standards and the promotion of sustainable development objectives (European Commission, 2023; OECD, 2024). By contrast, in the Republic of Serbia, the system remains in a phase of institutional development and progressive harmonization with EU standards (Dimitrijević & Stojić, 2019).

The 2003 reform of the CAP introduced the cross-compliance mechanism (Regulation (EC) No 1782/2003), which conditions direct payments to farmers upon compliance with baseline standards relating to environmental protection, food safety, animal

and plant health, and animal welfare, as well as requirements for maintaining land in good agricultural and environmental condition (GAEC). This reform also imposed an obligation on Member States to establish a Farm Advisory System (FAS) aimed at supporting farmers in understanding and implementing EU regulatory requirements.

Since 2007, Member States have been required to provide advisory services to farmers, while rural development measures have actively incentivized the use of such services. Notably, advisory services are also required to cooperate with forecasting and reporting systems to ensure the application of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) principles, as mandated by Directive 2009/128/EC. Furthermore, Regulation (EU) No 1306/2013, particularly Article 11, emphasizes the need to align advisory systems with IPM principles (Djurić et al., 2019).

In parallel, the Farm Advisory System pursues the broader objective inherent to agricultural advisory services—namely, enhancing the competitiveness of agricultural activities at the farm level. Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) provides for measures supporting professional training in agriculture and forestry (Measure 111), the use of advisory services (Measure 114), and advisory support for farm management and investment capacity building (Measure 115) (Djurić et al., 2019).

In the Republic of Serbia, agricultural advisory services constitute an important institutional mechanism for improving agricultural production and implementing agrarian policy. Their legal status is primarily governed by the Law on the Performance of Advisory and Professional Activities in Agriculture, which regulates the conditions for providing advisory services, organizational structures, and professional and licensing requirements for advisors. Additionally, the Law on Agriculture and Rural Development recognizes advisory services as a key instrument for sectoral development and support to agricultural holdings.

The legal and institutional framework in Serbia is characterized by a dominant role of the state in the organization and financing of advisory services. The system remains largely centralized, with advisory activities performed by public institutions and licensed professionals. Although empirical findings confirm their significant contribution to improving competitiveness and facilitating the adoption of modern technologies, advisory services continue to face structural constraints, including limited institutional capacity and insufficient digitalization (Dimitrijević & Stojić, 2019).

Recent developments indicate a broader transformation of advisory services—from traditional educational entities toward complex systems of knowledge governance and innovation management—reflecting their expanding role within contemporary agricultural and regulatory systems.

Materials and methods

The methodological framework of this study is grounded in qualitative legal research, relying on a combination of mutually complementary methods to ensure a comprehensive analysis of the subject matter.

At its core, the research employs normative legal analysis to interpret relevant sources of European Union law and the legal framework of the Republic of Serbia. This approach makes it possible to identify the key legal principles, regulatory mechanisms, and institutional features governing agricultural advisory services.

In addition, a comparative method is applied, enabling a structured comparison of legal solutions and institutional models in the European Union and Serbia. Attention is devoted to differences and similarities in institutional organization and the functional role of advisory services, with a view to identifying patterns of alignment and areas requiring further harmonization.

Further research incorporates content analysis of strategic and policy documents, including the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), IPARD instruments, and relevant national strategies. This method allows for a more nuanced understanding of policy objectives and the evolving role of advisory services within contemporary agricultural governance.

Finally, the method of synthesis is used to integrate the findings of the normative and comparative analyses, providing the basis for drawing conclusions and formulating normative recommendations.

The analysis is based on both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include European Union regulations within the framework of the Common Agricultural Policy, as well as the relevant laws and by-laws of the Republic of Serbia. Secondary sources comprise academic literature and reports issued by the European Commission, the OECD, and the FAO.

Literature Review

The literature review points to several key trends in the development of agricultural advisory systems. These include a transition from traditional advisory models toward innovation-driven systems, particularly within the framework of the Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS), the increasing digitalization of advisory services, and a growing role of the private sector within advisory structures.

European academic literature predominantly focuses on the role of advisory services in the implementation of the Common Agricultural Policy and the promotion of sustainable development. Authors such as Dwyer et al. (2018) and Borrás and Edquist (2019) emphasize that advisory services constitute a crucial link between EU normative requirements and their practical application at the farm level. In a similar vein, the European Commission (2021), through the AKIS concept, highlights the need for a more integrated approach that connects advisory services with research and

educational institutions. The European Commission emphasizes that advisory services constitute a key instrument for achieving the objectives of the Common Agricultural Policy (European Commission, 2023). Similarly, the OECD highlights that advisory services play a crucial role in enhancing both the productivity and sustainability of the agricultural sector (OECD, 2024).

In the academic literature in Serbia, particular attention is devoted to the structural limitations of the advisory system. Authors such as Bogdanov (2015) and Djurić (2019) point to persistent weaknesses, especially in relation to financing and the lack of decentralization. At the same time, empirical analyses indicate that advisory services have a significant positive impact on agricultural development in Serbia, contributing to increased productivity and competitiveness. They play an important role in improving farmers' access to information and facilitating the adoption of modern technologies. However, the literature also identifies notable constraints, including limited resources and broader institutional deficiencies, leading to the conclusion that further systemic improvements are necessary in order to fully realize the potential of advisory services (Dimitrijević & Stojić, 2019).

The academic literature in Serbia also places strong emphasis on the process of harmonizing national legislation with the *acquis Communautaire* of the European Union, particularly highlighting the challenges associated with implementation and institutional strengthening of advisory services. Analyses of the EU legal framework underline that the development of advisory systems is closely linked to broader principles of sustainability, environmental protection, and food safety (Jovanić & Đelić, 2013).

Kountios (2024) further stress that agricultural advisory services represent a key institutional mechanism for the dissemination of innovation and the modernization of agricultural production systems in Serbia, primarily by facilitating the transfer of scientific and technical knowledge into practical application at the farm level. In this context, advisory services extend beyond a purely informational function and operate as development-oriented institutions that support structural transformation within the agricultural sector. The authors also highlight their contribution to enhancing the competitiveness of Serbian agriculture, enabling farmers to respond more effectively to evolving market conditions and rapid technological change. Attention is given to their role in human capital development, as advisory services strengthen farmers' knowledge, skills, and capacity for informed and strategic decision-making in increasingly complex rural environments. (Kountios et al., 2024).

Overall, the review indicates a relatively limited number of empirical studies within the Serbian academic context, which further underscores the importance of normative and theoretical analyses in this field.

Research results

The European Model of Agricultural Advisory Services

Under EU law, agricultural advisory services perform a public-goods function, even though they are often delivered through a combination of public and private providers. Their financing is secured from Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) funds, subject to conditions regarding quality, independence, and transparency. Economically, this design internalizes the positive externalities of advisory work (e.g., improved productivity, environmental compliance, and risk management) while preserving some market-based choice for farmers.

Within the CAP framework, advisory services are institutionally embedded through the Farm Advisory System (FAS). This system serves to: ensure compliance with regulatory standards, enhance the long-term sustainability of agricultural production, and tie direct payments to both legal obligations and performance-related conditionality.

The core legal basis lies in Regulation (EU) 2021/2115, which establishes the CAP strategic plans. Key complementary acts are Regulation (EU) 2021/2116 and Regulation (EU) 2021/2117, which specify the ways in which Member States must operationalize advisory services in practice.

A legal-economic analysis of Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 in the part governing agricultural advisory services (PSS) reveals a shift from advisory work as an exogenous support service to an endogenous, statutorily mandated component of the broader Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS). In economic terms, this strengthens the institutional complementarity between research, education, and on-farm decision-making, thereby improving the rate of technology adoption and the efficiency of public spending.

AKIS represents an integrated framework linking farmers, research institutions, advisory services, and public authorities. Advisory services are under a formal obligation to provide support in the areas of: sustainable management of natural resources, compliance with environmental and climate standards, and digitalization and innovation in agriculture.

These domains are also central to the economics of modern agriculture, as they shape long-run cost structures, risk exposure, and market access.

Article 15 of Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 functions as the “constitutional” core of the advisory system under the 2023–2027 CAP period. Unlike earlier regulations, which treated advisory systems as merely recommended, Article 15 imposes a binding obligation on Member States to establish a system that provides advice to farmers and other beneficiaries of CAP support. This transforms advisory services from a discretionary, potentially under-provided good into a policy-mandated service, correcting for market failures linked to asymmetric information, risk aversion, and bounded rationality.

Within the AKIS framework, advisory services are now defined as one of the three pillars (alongside research and farmers). This status implies that they are not simply information conveyors, but active participants in the co-creation and diffusion of innovation. From an economic perspective, this strengthens the link between knowledge creation and on-farm application, thereby improving the marginal productivity of agricultural inputs and facilitating structural adjustment.

A key innovation in Article 15(3) concerns objectivity and conflicts of interest. The Regulation requires that providers of advisory services act impartially, and it explicitly excludes EU-funded advice that promotes the seller's own inputs (e.g., seeds, pesticides, fertilizers). This rule functions as a regulatory safeguard against rent-seeking, aligning private incentives with the public interest in sustainable and cost-efficient farming practices.

The Regulation also specifies, in a binding manner, the substantive content of advisory services. This is no longer a matter of professional discretion, but reflects a statutory minimum that shapes the service bundle offered to farmers:

Conditionality: advisers must inform farmers about standards of good agricultural and environmental practice (GAEC) and the relevant statutory requirements on management (SMR), thereby reducing compliance risk and potential payment reductions.

Social conditionality: for the first time, advisory services are obliged to provide information on working-conditions standards and employers' obligations in agriculture, internalizing labour-cost and compliance considerations into farm-level planning.

Risk management: the Regulation requires advice on financial instruments and insurance, which complements the usual role of the banking sector and thereby improves farmers' capacity to manage income volatility and production risk.

The Regulation further introduces a formal requirement to use digital tools, such as the *Farm Sustainability Tool for Nutrients* (FaST). In institutional-economic terms, this pushes advisory services into a digital-data ecosystem that is interoperable with national parcel-identification systems (LPIS) and integrated administrative-control systems (IACS). With this trend, the Regulation indirectly activates stricter data-protection duties under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), since advisers handle sensitive farm-level information whose mismanagement could affect both privacy and competitive positioning.

Within the legal architecture of Regulation (EU) 2021/2115, Annexes III and IV form the operational core of the new "green" and "social" conditionality. For agricultural advisory services (PSS), these Annexes are not merely technical checklists, but a legal-economic roadmap that defines the content of their work and the accountability of operators toward the state and the EU.

Annex III translates earlier "greening" elements into strict conditionality standards, directly linking non-compliance to reductions in subsidies. Advisory services therefore

play a price-signal-transmission role: they help farmers interpret how environmental and soil-management rules adjust the effective net return to production. Key elements include: GAEC 1–3 (water and soil): protection of wet habitats, prohibition of straw burning, and preservation of river courses. Here, the adviser acts as a technical planner, assisting farmers in mapping buffer zones and thus internalizing spatial-land-use trade-offs into farm-level decisions.

GAEC 7 (crop rotation): stricter rules on crop rotation to preserve soil productivity. Legal-agronomic analysis finds advisers need both agronomic and legal knowledge to ensure cropping plans meet statutory requirements, supporting a shift from short-term profits to long-term capital preservation. GAEC 8 (biodiversity): the obligation to maintain a minimum share of non-productive areas (e.g., hedgerows, trees). From an economic-institutional perspective, the adviser functions as an ecological-norm interpreter, helping farmers to treat such areas not as “lost” land, but as conditionally necessary for retaining subsidy income.

Annex IV (social conditionality) links the payment of agricultural subsidies to compliance with fundamental workers’ rights. Under Article 15, advisory services must incorporate elements of labor law into their portfolio, including Directive 2019/1152 on transparent and predictable working conditions and Directive 89/391/EEC on occupational health and safety. In economic-legal terms, this expands the advisory role into the domain of labor-cost and compliance risk management.

In this framework, the adviser assumes something akin to the role of a *compliance economist*: the adviser no longer only checks whether the wheat crop is properly fertilized, but also—indirectly—ensures that seasonal workers are duly registered and provided with adequate protective equipment. Given that breaches of labor-law requirements since 2025 have triggered penalties across the entire subsidy amount, advisory assistance in interpreting Annex IV has become one of the most economically valuable components of the service for large holdings employing hired labor.

The Legal Status of Agricultural Advisory Services in the Republic of Serbia

The legal position of agricultural advisory services in the Republic of Serbia is primarily shaped by a dual normative framework that combines sector-specific regulation with broader agrarian and rural-development legislation. At the core of this framework lies the Law on the Provision of Advisory and Professional Activities in the Field of Agriculture (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No. 30/10.), which defines the conditions and modalities for providing advisory services, the organization of the system, and the professional and licensing requirements for agricultural advisers. The Agriculture and Rural Development Act (Official Gazette of RS”, Nos. 41/2009, 10/2013 - other law, 101/2016, 67/2021 - other law, 114/2021 and 19/2025) identifies advisory services as essential tools for agricultural sector growth and support, integrating them into broader agrarian policy.

Within this structure, the advisory system in Serbia is characterized by a strong role of the state in both organization and financing. The system remains largely centralized, with advisory activities carried out by public institutions and licensed private advisers operating under state-approved programs (Dimitrijević & Stojić, 2019). The legal framework grants these entities a quasi-public function: their primary objective is not direct profit generation, but the improvement of agricultural productivity, competitiveness, and the adoption of modern technologies and sustainable practices (Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management- MAFWM, 2025).

The Law on the Provision of Advisory and Professional Activities in the Field of Agriculture further establishes a formal licensing regime for agricultural advisers, including requirements related to education, professional experience, and continuous training. This licensing system functions as a gate-keeping mechanism, aiming to ensure that advisory services meet minimum quality standards and contribute to the professionalization of the agricultural sector. In addition, the law mandates the planning of advisory activities through a medium-term and annual program, which aligns the provision of advice with national agrarian priorities and EU-compatible policy objectives (Regulation on the Establishment of the Medium-Term Programme for the Development of Agricultural Advisory Services for the Period 2026–2030, "Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 119 of 29 December 2025).

The Agriculture and Rural Development Act reinforce this institutional role by explicitly linking advisory services with other key components of the agricultural-policy framework, such as the Register of Agricultural Holdings, rural-development programs, and support schemes for innovation and modernization. In this sense, advisory services are no longer treated as marginal support bodies, but as central actors in the implementation of agrarian policy and the translation of legal and regulatory requirements into on-farm practice. This is particularly evident in the context of cross-compliance-related obligations and the gradual integration of Serbia's agricultural-support system with European Union-inspired conditionality mechanisms (Dimitrijević & Stojić, 2019).

Empirical analyses indicate that advisory services in Serbia have a significant positive effect on agricultural productivity and competitiveness, primarily by improving farmers' access to information and facilitating the adoption of modern technologies and management practices (Djurić, 2019; Stojić & Đurić, 2020). At the same time, this body of research identifies structural weaknesses, including limited financial resources, insufficient decentralization, and delayed digitalization, which constrain the ability of advisory services to fully match the evolving demands of the sector (Dimitrijević & Stojić, 2019). The recent adoption of the *Regulation on the Establishment of the Medium-Term Programme for the Development of Agricultural Advisory Services for the Period 2026–2030* aims at addressing these shortcomings by modernizing service delivery methods, expanding the use of digital tools, and improving the integration of advisory activities with broader data and monitoring systems (Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management- MAFWM, 2025).

Regulation serves as a strategic legislative bridge toward the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). It orchestrates a fundamental paradigm shift, transforming agricultural advisers from mere "field administrators" into "knowledge managers." This reform provides substantive evidence that Serbia has commenced a deep-seated harmonization process—at least at the level of secondary legislation—thereby addressing the pivotal recommendations outlined in the European Commission's Progress Reports.

Far from being a routine technical extension of previous initiatives, this Decree explicitly introduces the concept of the Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS) into the Serbian legal corpus for the first time. By doing so, it provides the legal legitimacy required to transition from a traditional, linear "advisor-to-farmer" model to a sophisticated network-based collaborative framework.

The Regulations mandates the adoption of an integrated digital ecosystem, characterized by two primary legal innovations:

- **Verification of Performance:** Advisory activities are now legally recognized only if recorded in real-time via a dedicated platform synchronized with the eAgrar system.
- **Institutional Interoperability:** The integration of advisory logs with the Directorate for Agrarian Payments facilitates seamless data exchange. This significantly alleviates the administrative burden on producers regarding the evidentiary requirements for Good Agricultural Practices (GAP).

A cornerstone of this Regulation is the establishment of rigorous criteria for the accreditation of non-state advisory service providers:

Regulatory Alignment: In direct response to Article 15 of Regulation (EU) 2021/2115, the Decree introduces stringent "anti-bias" provisions and conflict-of-interest protocols (e.g., prohibiting affiliations between advisers and input distributors).

IPARD III Accessibility: This framework establishes the necessary legal pathway for activating Measure 9 of the IPARD III program, enabling the utilization of EU funds for co-financing private-sector advisory services—a mechanism previously obstructed by legislative gaps.

Diverging from legacy programs that prioritized yield maximization, the current strategic framework reorients focus toward:

Eco-Schemes: Advisers are repositioned as primary facilitators for the implementation of complex, performance-based eco-payment models.

Animal Welfare: The introduction of a mandatory training module on animal welfare addresses a critical normative deficit identified in previous legislative analyses, aligning domestic practice with high European ethical and sanitary standards.

Negotiating Chapter 11: Alignment of Serbia's Agricultural Policy with the EU CAP Framework

Negotiating Chapter 11 encompasses one of the most complex and financially demanding policies of the European Union – the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The CAP serves as the EU's central instrument for regulating agricultural production, stabilizing markets, ensuring farmers' income, and fostering the sustainable development of rural areas. Its legal basis is enshrined in Articles 38–44 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), which delineate the objectives of agricultural policy, including increased productivity, market stability, food security, and a fair standard of living for the agricultural community.

In the contemporary legal landscape, the CAP is intrinsically linked to the objectives of sustainable development, environmental protection, and climate action, particularly following the 2013 and 2021 reforms. The new CAP for the 2023–2027 period is structured around the principles of “Green Architecture,” which integrates eco-schemes, conditionality, and the enhancement of rural development through the Second Pillar of the CAP.

In this context, Farm Advisory Services (FAS) have become a mandatory institutional mechanism for EU Member States, as mandated by Regulation (EU) 2021/2115. Their purpose is to provide professional, technical, and legal support to farmers in implementing EU standards, specifically regarding:

- Environmental protection and biodiversity,
- Climate mitigation and adaptation measures,
- Food safety,
- Animal welfare,
- Digitalization and innovation in agriculture.

The European Commission's Progress Reports for Serbia (Chapter 11) consistently highlight the following normative and structural shortcomings:

1. **Legal Fragmentation:** The advisory system remains isolated from research institutes. The Law of 2010 fails to account for “innovation brokering,” which is a prerequisite under the modern AKIS (Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System) model.
2. **Erosion of Public Function:** It is noted that the Agricultural Advisory and Professional Services (PSSS) in Serbia devote excessive resources to the administration of subsidies, rather than the transfer of knowledge concerning environmental standards (GAEC – Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions).
3. **Accreditation Deficit for IPARD III:** Without legislative amendments to allow private consultants to become “authorized service providers,” Serbia will remain unable to utilize funds from Measure 9 of the IPARD program.

Discussion

A comparative analysis reveals that while Serbia possesses a foundational normative framework, it lacks the functional integration and systemic flexibility inherent in the EU model.

Under EU regulations, animal welfare is strictly treated as a prerequisite for subsidy eligibility (Conditionality). In contrast, Serbian legislation primarily links advisory work to “enhanced productivity and competitiveness.” Within the EU context, advisors are legally mandated to train farmers in standards that transcend mere economic gain, incorporating ethical and ecological dimensions. In Serbia, these aspects currently fall within the jurisdiction of veterinary inspections rather than the advisory remit.

Article 15 of Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 stipulates that advisory systems must be integrated into national AKIS Strategic Plans through the mandatory use of digital logs.

The Serbian Gap: Current Serbian law still relies on an “Advisory Log” (Advisory Service Work Log) which is frequently maintained in paper form or isolated Excel formats, lacking interoperability with eAgrar.

The IPARD Requirement: Without a statutory obligation for digital, real-time reporting of farm visits—including GPS coordinates and digital signatures—it is impossible to satisfy EU transparency requirements for the disbursement of IPARD funds.

Regulation 2021/2115 introduces the legal concept of the “Innovation Broker.” This normative innovation redefines the advisor as a critical bridge between academia (universities) and practical application.

Definition Deficit: Article 3 of the Serbian Law defines advisory work as “the provision of expert advice, instructions, and practical demonstrations.” This definition preserves a linear, top-down model of knowledge transfer, whereas the EU mandates a network-based model characterized by multi-actor interaction within the AKIS framework.

EU regulations require Member States to ensure that advisors undergo continuous professional development and maintain a status of impartiality.

The Certification Void: A significant legislative vacuum exists in Serbia regarding the licensing of private-sector advisors. The prevailing law focuses almost exclusively on experts within public services (PSSS). The absence of a clear legal framework for the certification of independent consultants prevents the emergence of a competitive “knowledge market,” directly hindering the implementation of the Green Deal in Serbia.

The Serbian Law on Advisory Services has become obsolete relative to the CAP 2023–2027 paradigm. While it was designed to support conventional agricultural production, the EU Regulation demands a framework that fosters sustainable resource management, digitalization, and social responsibility. To ensure success in the EU integration process, an urgent revision of Articles 3 and 4 of the Serbian Law is required to incorporate the concepts of animal welfare, digital integration, and institutional impartiality.

Conclusions

Agricultural advisory services represent a key instrument of sustainable agrarian policy. The EU model, built on the Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS) approach, demonstrates a high degree of legal coherence and institutional efficiency (European Commission, 2023; Kountios, 2024). The legal status of advisory services thus constitutes a central element of the contemporary agricultural system. While the European Union has developed a relatively advanced and integrated model, Serbia remains in a phase of institutional transformation and harmonization with EU standards (Dimitrijević & Stojić, 2019).

In Serbia, the legal framework governing advisory services rests primarily on laws that regulate their organization, licensing, and supervision. These acts define the conditions under which advisory activities may be carried out, the professional requirements for advisers, and the role of public authorities in overseeing the system. However, analyses indicate a significant gap between the normative framework and practical implementation. Research suggests that advisory services in Serbia play an important role in agricultural development, but they also face persistent institutional constraints (Dimitrijević & Stojić, 2019). The main challenges include the high degree of system centralization, insufficient digitalization, and limited institutional capacity. These shortcomings point to the need for further development of the legal and institutional framework.

In the European Union, the digitalization of agriculture and rural areas is regarded as one of the main pathways toward a more modern, competitive, and sustainable sector. The European Commission stresses that digitalization promotes the adoption of digital technologies and data-driven approaches, aiming both to enhance productivity and to improve the quality of life in rural communities (European Commission, 2023; OECD, 2024). Within the new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) for the period 2023–2027, the AKIS framework plays a central role in the modernization of agriculture and rural areas by linking knowledge, innovation, and digitalization. Member States are expected to show, in their strategic plans, how they will connect advisory services, research institutions, and support networks, thereby ensuring that technological and policy innovations reach farmers in a systematic and effective way (Kountios, 2024; European Commission, 2023).

In this context, the EU is moving beyond simply promoting new technologies to build an integrated ecosystem that embeds them into everyday farm management. Satellite-based crop monitoring, digital parcel maps, sensors, systems for tracking soil moisture and temperature, precision treatment of crops, and artificial-intelligence-based decision-support tools are increasingly treated as standard components of farm management (European Commission, 2023). The EU's comparative advantage lies not only in the technical availability of these tools, but in the institutional architecture that supports them—through public policies, research programs, advisory services, training, and financial instruments (Kountios, 2024).

For Serbia, the alignment of the legal status of its advisory services with EU requirements will require further development of the legal and institutional framework. The adoption of a new Law on Agricultural Advisory Services is necessary, as the current legislation does not explicitly recognize concepts such as “innovation brokering” or the use of digital registers of advisory visits, which are mandatory in the EU for transparency and monitoring purposes (European Commission, 2023). Serbia’s legal framework should allow private advisory agencies to participate equally in IPARD III, especially Measure 9 (Advisory Services), to enhance system pluralism and efficiency.

In the EU, the integration of databases is a key requirement. In Serbia, however, data on advisory activities are often isolated from the eAgrar system, which prevents the effective monitoring of how advice affects farm productivity and the implementation of conditionality rules. A key policy recommendation for Serbian lawmakers is to transform agricultural advisory services from being mere “executive bodies of the Ministry” into innovation-facilitating actors within a broader AKIS-type architecture. This shift should be accompanied by the introduction of formal legal mechanisms for the accreditation of private advisers, clearly defined quality standards, and digital interoperability between advisory-activity records and national agricultural-information systems.

Conflict of interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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