AUDIT

Audit of the key project DigiAgriFoodCH programme

Federal Office for Agriculture

KEY FACTS

The Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) conducted its first audit of the key project "Digital Transformation of the FOAG and the Swiss Agriculture and Food Sector" (DigiAgriFoodCH) at the Federal Office for Agriculture (FOAG). Managed as a programme, this key project implements the FOAG' digitalisation strategy by means of ten measures running from 2024 to 2031. The total budget amounts to just under CHF 100 million. The programme aims to deliver benefits for partners along the entire value chain of the sector. Its focus is on the multiple use of data and the simplification of processes.

The aim of the audit was to assess whether the DigiAgriFoodCH programme achieved its objectives during the initiation phase. The SFAO found that the programme has largely been set up in a targeted manner. However, it identified several areas for improvement in programme management, which it recommends the FOAG should address. The transformation of the FOAG into an agile organisation is progressing less satisfactorily; the FOAG is not approaching it with sufficient ambition.

Lack of measurement of efficiency gains in the agriculture and food sector

The entire agriculture and food sector faces complex data flows. The current system landscape is highly fragmented, with many processes still carried out manually or with minimal automation. The once-only principle – where data is captured once and reused multiple times – remains more of a vision than a reality. Through the DigiAgriFoodCH programme, the FOAG aims to create added value for its partners, harness data as a resource, and strengthen digital sovereignty within the sector.

The programme promises efficiency gains for its partners along the entire value chain. However, the specific added value that stakeholders in the agriculture and food sector can expect has not yet been clearly defined. A methodology for measuring these benefits is also lacking. While evaluating all relevant perspectives and impacts is complex, it could significantly enhance the project' acceptance.

Efficiency gains can also be achieved through the cross-cutting use of identification numbers, such as the identification number from the Business and Enterprise Register (BER). However, the current legal basis restricts the use of the BER number. The FOAG has implemented an interim solution, but the issue persists for future digitalisation projects within the Administration. It is therefore important that the legal basis is adapted swiftly and purposefully.

The programme is off to a good start, but improvements are needed in programme management and in the FOAG's transformation into an agile organisation

The DigiAgriFoodCH programme is generally well-structured and has delivered initial results. However, it is heavily reliant on the programme leadership. In some instances, the programme leadership assumes roles at the programme, project and measure levels. This presents risks. There is a danger of overload – and with it, the risk of insufficient oversight or course correction – when too much responsibility is concentrated in one person.

The stakeholders are highly diverse, and the environment is complex. The current stakeholder management lacks a centralised plan and coordination of measures aligned with the overall programme planning. There is also no high-level schedule covering the entire programme duration that maps out the key dependencies. The total cost estimate of just under CHF 100 million is based on an initial rough calculation from 2023. To improve transparency, this estimate must be updated regularly.

According to the digitalisation strategy, the FOAG is to become an agile, learning organisation. A vision and target framework in the form of guiding principles exist only conceptually. How this is to be implemented has not yet been determined.