

Programming Innovation in Rural Development – Linking Science and Practice

by Mark Redman

On 25 - 26 November 2013, DG Agriculture and Rural Development invited national / regional Managing Authorities, together with members of the AKIS Working Group, to a technical seminar in Berlin to discuss practical aspects of the new working interface that the EIP provides between farmers, researchers, farm advisors, consumers and other rural stakeholders at EU, national and regional level. The seminar was hosted by the German Federal Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Consumer Protection, and around 140 people participated in a diverse programme of presentations, workshops and open discussion.

The Berlin seminar focussed on key issues such as the opportunities that now exist for enhancing the linkages and promoting the synergies between research activities supported under Horizon 2020 and projects funded by Rural Development Programmes (RDPs), in particular the EIP Operational Groups.

In parallel workshops, participants shared ideas about the practical aspects of setting-up Operational Groups, the provisions for innovation support services, most appropriate techniques for fostering partnership, and the various challenges of developing meaningful dialogue between rural stakeholders and scientists.

During the second day of the seminar, the participants were invited to exchange knowledge, ideas and experiences on EIP programming in series of “open discussions” that were initiated by the participants themselves on a diverse range of topical issues such as innovation as a cross-cutting theme in rural development policy, selection criteria for operational groups, eligible expenditure for operational groups, state aids as well as the relationship between freedom to innovate and the need for administrative control.

The seminar demonstrated that the EIP is increasingly well embedded in rural development programmes at national and regional level and that stakeholders have high expectations as regards the practice-oriented projects funded under Horizon 2020. In his closing speech, Dr. Eiden, President of the German Federal office for Agriculture and Food (BLE), stressed that, “The coming year of 2014 will be crucial for the implementation of the EIP, both in the context of rural development policy as well as the research and innovation framework Horizon 2020. We must make more use of the innovative potential of cooperation. EIP means *innovation partnership* and we must focus on this”.