

Workshop

"Connecting Research and Practice in Agriculture and Rural Areas"



BRUSSELS 14 JANUARY 2014

On 14 January 2014, DG AGRI and the EIP-AGRI Service Point organised a workshop, which focussed on the practical aspects of the Horizon 2020 calls for multi-actor projects and thematic networks related to agriculture and forestry.

The workshop was kicked off by DG AGRI director Jose Sousa Uva who gave a brief introduction, underlining the importance of connecting science and practice. The + 250 participants, who followed on- and offline, were then given a more in-depth presentation about the concepts behind the Horizon 2020 EIP by the Head of Unit of the new DG AGRI "Research and Innovation" unit, Rob Peters.

Inge van Oost, also from DG AGRI, provided more details on the specific calls and the thinking behind the Multi Actor approach (MA) and the Thematic Networks (TN). She stressed that although the calls emphasise the need to involve all concerned actors, it is not about representation but about bringing in the people with the right kind of knowledge and demonstrate in the project proposal that different actors are involved all along the project period: from defining the questions, to planning and implementing research work, to experiments and possible demonstrations and dissemination. For the TNs, she pointed out that the calls do not define the themes and that applicants can propose themes bottom-up in areas where they see research results and best practices that are near to be put into practice, but not known or tested by practitioners at a wider scale.

Koen Desimpelaere presented the EIP-AGRI Service Point and explained how it can assist people and organisations looking to participate in Horizon 2020. For this call, there is a dedicated LinkedIn group to help people find project partners for the MA and TN calls.

<http://www.linkedin.com/groups/Partner-Search-Horizon-2020-Food-7416906>

The second part of the morning went into the nuts and bolts of the evaluation rules and procedures related to the calls as well as the question of what makes a good project.

Massimo Burioni, scientific officer in DG R&I, explained the novelties in Horizon 2020, namely the single set of rules applying across work programme, the simplification on financial rules and the simplification of the evaluation criteria.

Application will now be done filling a fully electronic proposal online through the participant portal and proposals will be evaluated on the basis of three criteria: Excellence, Impact as well as Quality and Efficiency in Implementation.

On the procedure of evaluation, Mr Burioni explained that certain proposals (TN) would be subject to an evaluation in one step and others in two steps (MA). For the latter, this would mean that evaluators would first evaluate the on the basis of the excellence and impact criteria and that the best would be requested to submit the full proposal. In practice there will then be two deadlines: one for the first part and another for the second part. For projects evaluated in the one step process, all documents should be submitted at the same time. The specific deadlines can be found in the presentation of Ms van Oost. For information, the evaluation criteria are also available on the [participants' portal](#) for applicants to scrutinize them in more detail.

Tim Hall, who previously headed the unit dealing with agricultural research in DG RTD, shared some practical advice on how to make a good project. Firstly, time spent developing mutual understanding amongst project partners pays dividends in the future, he said, and warned not to let those mastering the English language dominate less proficient English speakers. He stressed the role of the coordinator, saying that it should not only be a good leader from a technical point of view but also someone able to master administrative issues and have the trust and respect of all partners. Technical brilliance would not be enough and choice and training of coordinator should be given priority, he said.

Communication and dissemination is essential and the best projects have engaged professional support for this. It is vital to have people or organisations that can translate results into something that is easily understood by practitioners as well as decision makers. Having in place a stakeholder engagement strategy, which goes beyond the directly involved partners, is equally important and this should not just be window dressing: a project board of stakeholders should be listened to and taken into account, he said.

Finally, Mr Hall encouraged the audience to register for the evaluation panels in particular experts with a broad mix of experience (not only scientific). This can also be done via the [Horizon 2020 participant portal](#) and preferably as soon as possible as selection of experts for this call is already ongoing.

The afternoon session focussed on the practical experience with connection research and practice with a number of presentations underlining lessons learned and recommendations.

Yann Pouliquen, who works as a farm advisor in Spain, gave some practical examples from his work on how to connect research and practice. He stressed the need to create conditions for farmer-researcher negotiations on the project content as well as the need for interface and "translation" between the two groups.

Frank Wijnands presented some lessons learned from the ongoing FP7 Pure IPM project. The emphasis here was on the requirements for successful co-innovation such as the need for a good facilitator with the skills and tools to connect the different project partners and in this respect, said Mr Wijnands, training and coaching could play an essential role.

In his presentation about the nationally funded French FloracQ project, Aurelien Esposito-Fava told about his experience with interactive project funding and thematic networks where different organisations work together on a common platform. Amongst the lessons learned, he stressed the importance of both farmer involvement from the very beginning and of well-functioning innovation brokering and support services.

Cristina Micheloni, from Italian AIAB, presented a FP6 organic wine project (ORWINE), which had a large involvement by different stakeholder groups and in particular a large number of wine growers. She shared her experience on how to make a successful project such as: focus on real problems as experienced by farmers, ensure equal participation for all actors, give constant feed back to the producers as they will not wait for scientific papers, and said that it's easier for farmers to trust innovation if they see it done by other farmers rather than by scientists. She did warn that involvement and feedback is time demanding and called for projects to find new and better tools to communicate with farmers.

This was seconded by the presentation by Marek Krysztoforski from the Polish leg of the Baltic Deal project. Giving an overview of the results of the project, Mr Krysztoforski showcased an inspiring number of dissemination channels that can be effectively used to communicate with farmers. This included exchange visits to partnering countries, the development of an innovation e-platform with easy available information for end-users, video clips, publications, guidelines, training, manuals and farm visits including of course demonstration farms.

All presentations are available online as is the summary of the Q&A sessions. Both can be found on the workshop [webpage](#).