

Tips for planning the Role of NRNs and their activities in implementing the European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability (EIP-AGRI)

Note: The document is based on discussions and exchanges within the two day training workshop from the training workshop on [“Networking for Innovation in the 2014-2020 RDPs”](#) that was hosted by the Flemish Rural Network in Ghent, Belgium, on 18-19 March, 2014

Fostering innovation is a new objective of rural networking for 2014-2020 and it is expected that NRNs will play many roles in fostering innovation, including in some cases the provision of specific support for implementation of the European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability (EIP-AGRI).

Although a specific network (complete with dedicated Service Point) has been put in place at EU level to support the implementation of the EIP-AGRI and to enable the networking of EIP-AGRI Operational Groups, there is **no obligation** for Member States to create a specialised innovation or EIP network at the national level.

The role of supporting implementation of the EIP-AGRI at national / regional level can instead be taken on by the NRN together with other existing and / or new structures. As a minimum, NRNs can be active in i) raising awareness of the EIP-AGRI amongst relevant stakeholders, and ii) helping disseminate the results of projects supported under the EIP-AGRI. The NRNs are especially well-placed to facilitate this exchange of information across regional or national borders, and this may be a worthwhile function in many Member States. NRNs can also help exchange information between EIP Operational Groups and LAGs.

Where appropriate, NRNs may also get much more actively involved in the setting up of EIP-AGRI Operational Groups by linking different persons or groups that have ideas for projects.

However, it is also to keep some things in mind:

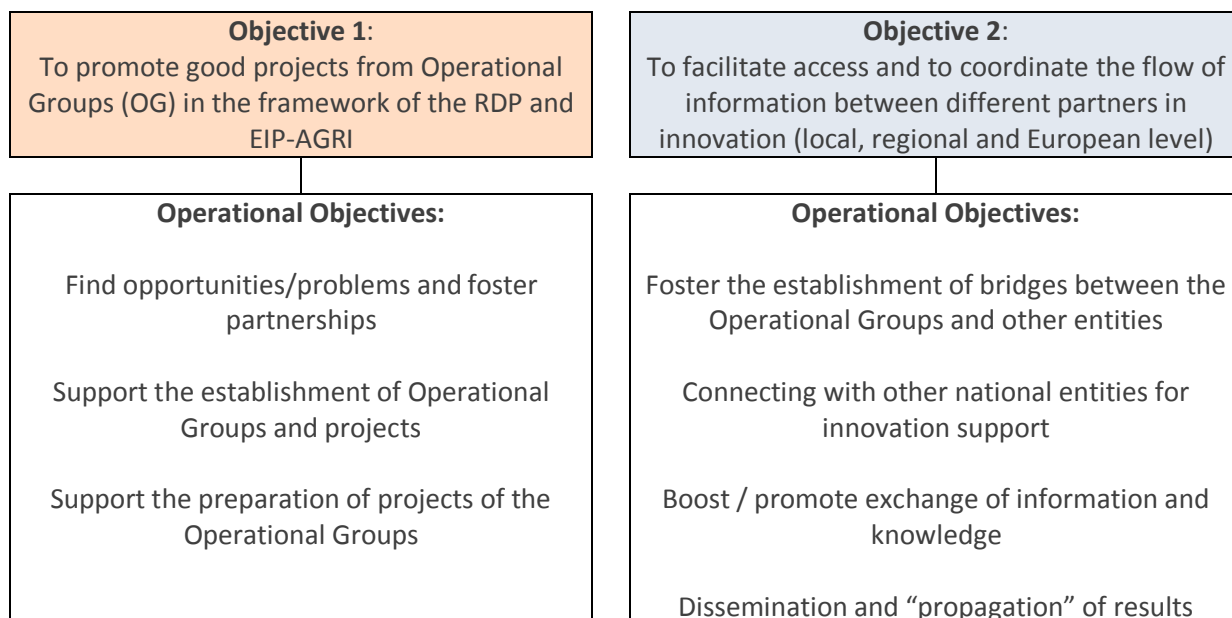
- Since it will be necessary to involve new stakeholders (scientists and others actively involved in innovation) in the EIP-AGRI related activities, NRNs may decide to create a thematic working group or committee to help steer and advise the NRN activities on support for innovation. Such a sub-group should clearly remain within the existing NRN governance;
- In order to perform the functions to support innovation it is recommended for NRNs to actively look for co-operation and synergy with other networks, research institutes, resource centres etc. For example, in the period 2014-2020, the networking functions of other EU funds are also reinforced;
- Since networking is an on-going process, ensuring flexibility in structures and planned activities for supporting the EIP-AGRI will help to respond to the changing needs of stakeholders at different stages of the policy cycle;
- Since innovation can significantly benefit from exchange and networking at EU level it is recommended that all network support units (NSUs) have capacity to work with the [EIP-AGRI Network](#), notably via the EIP-AGRI Service Point¹. On the one hand, NRNs can feed the EIP-AGRI Network with relevant information, such as examples of projects and good practices. On the other hand the NRN will get access to information provided by the EIP-AGRI Network, including innovative projects in other Member States, projects as well as outcomes of the work of focus groups, workshops and seminars.

¹ The NRNs are advised to contact the the EIP-AGRI Service Point for all questions related to operational groups, Horizon 2020, participation in EIP-AGRI focus groups, innovation support services, etc.

An interesting example of NRN support for implementation of the EIP-AGRI is provided by the Portuguese National Network for Rural Development (PNNRD) – see below.

EXAMPLE: NRN Set up and Support for the EIP-AGRI in Portugal

The 2014-2020 Action Plan for the PNNRD contains two inter-connected objectives for “fostering innovation” under which there are a further 7 operational objectives all of which represent potentially important NRN functions for supporting implementation of the EIP-AGRI:



These objectives are pursued via a range of general activities including:

- A Thematic Working Group that has an overview of all relevant network activities and provides a forum for connecting key network partners
- Organisation of regional and national workshops, meetings and other events to promote EIP-AGRI Operational Groups (OGs)
- Participation at other relevant events
- Provision of an on-line information / ‘Help Desk’ service via the NRN website
- Active dissemination of relevant information from various sources, including a newsletter and development of FAQs
- Searching for animators / innovation brokers
- Promotion / dissemination of the results of innovative projects
- Bring together partners to encourage applications in thematic networks H2020

Three further very specific features of the support provided by PNNRD for implementing the EIP-AGRI in Portugal are:

1. Establishment of a national “Initiatives Centre” – this has been set-up with RDP funding to provide a match-making service to connect partners and project promoters interested to form EIP-AGRI Operational Groups. All Operational Groups will be registered through the Initiative Centre and the Centre will provide a range of services to support the development of project proposals and Action Plans;

2. Creation of links with Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (FCT) - the national funding agency for science, technology and innovation, in all scientific domains, under responsibility of the Ministry for Education and Science;
3. Close co-operation with INOVISA, a non-profit association for innovation, knowledge and technology transfer which works to strengthen the links between science and industry. INOVISA leads a national innovation network – Rede INOVAR (www.redeinovar.pt) – which is also funded by the Portuguese RDP and currently links 77 entities in the agricultural, food and forestry sectors with the aim support the transfer of innovative ideas from research labs to the real world. Linkage to INOVISA and Rede INOVAR greatly increases the capacity of the Portuguese NRN (PNNRD) to support implementation of the EIP-AGRI.

SOME REFLECTIONS AND LESSONS LEARNT

The following notes are taken from the training workshop on “[Networking for Innovation in the 2014-2020 RDPs](#)” that was hosted by the Flemish Rural Network in Ghent, Belgium, on 18-19 March 2014:

- Technical assistance money from 2007-2013 is being used in some Member States to build capacity for innovation support services in 2014-2020 e.g. the establishment and running of an Initiative Centre (innovation broker) in Portugal
- There are many existing innovation support services / networks which NRNs can work in partnership with to support the EIP-AGRI – the example from Portugal is particularly inspiring. Existing networks can, for example, provide links to the research community and immediately develop synergy with the NRN
- In order to facilitate a bottom-up implementation of the EIP-AGRI, it may be necessary to firstly build the ‘architecture’ for innovation support services from the top-down
- NRNs can clearly play an important role in supporting implementation of the EIP-AGRI (e.g. awareness-raising, facilitation, dissemination), but there is no one approach that will “fit all”
- Do the NRNs fully understand the needs of farmers? Further actions may be needed to build closer links with the farming community
- NRNs will need additional resources to effectively support the EIP-AGRI. If no additional resources, how to achieve more with less? Is there political commitment to provide more resources? Is the added value of the NRNs fully understood / appreciated?
- Don’t forget – there is no obligation for NRNs to provide specific innovation support services for the EIP-AGRI. Depending upon national / regional context it may not be necessary or appropriate.

Practical actions that NRNs can include in their annual work plans to foster innovation

- Quickly raise awareness of the EIP-AGRI with events, workshops, publications etc. – stakeholders need to know more as soon as possible
- Focus on actions for changing the culture of rural innovation, the ‘mind-set’ of the institutions, farmers, researchers, advisers etc. needs to be open to the new opportunities for interactive innovation projects
- Map stakeholders relevant to the EIP-AGRI (e.g. to include new stakeholders from research area) – not only who, but also what are their problems / needs
- A clearly structured / strategic approach to NRN support for the EIP-AGRI is recommended, including a specific Action Plan that contains objectives and actions for innovation. Consider separate governance e.g. a Thematic Working Group or Steering Group
- Build on what exists already! New structures do not necessarily have to be created
- Interact with farmers – participate in their events, understand their needs, approach them with information about the opportunities and get their trust
- Interact with the EIP-AGRI Service Point – get in contact, collaborate, provide them with information about the implementation of the EIP at national/regional level, etc.