

Country summary for Belgium¹

Rural Development in Belgium is managed on a decentralised basis by the two main administrative regions of the country, Flanders and Wallonia, each of which has responsibility for rural development policy implementation in their region. In Wallonia, overall responsibility is undertaken by the General Directorate of Agriculture, in Flanders the responsibility lies within the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. There is one National Strategic Plan which provides the overall framework for rural development policy in Belgium and then for each administrative region there are separate Rural Development Programmes, Managing Authorities and a Paying Agencies for each administrative region. The Belgian National Strategy Plan includes a national chapter and two regional chapters.



Map of Belgium
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Website: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/rural-development-policy/country-information/belgium/en/belgium_home_en.cfm

General socio-economic situation in rural areas in Belgium

Belgium covers an area of 30,528 km² and has a population of about 10.4 million. It is located in north-western Europe and borders France, Luxembourg, Germany and the Netherlands. Belgium's GDP per capita is higher than the EU-25 average (117% in 2004) and it is one of the 10 biggest commercial nations in the world. Of particular advantage is Belgium's central position, reinforced by the high productivity of its work force. Labour productivity is particularly important in the industrial, construction and finance sectors. Belgium's GDP per income – considered the most relevant classification in terms of wealth - is third highest worldwide (directly behind the United States and Luxembourg). In 2004, Belgium's unemployment rate stood at 8.4% but it should be noted that pronounced differences exist between areas. Between 1995 and 2004, Belgium's share of industry (measured at current prices) decreased from 23.2% to 19.9% of the Belgian GVA. However, the weight of services (measured at current prices) increased during this period, largely as a consequence of the development of its commercial services sector (73.2% of GVA). Structurally, the business community in Belgium is dominated by a number of large companies and an even greater number of SMEs. Approximately 97% of Belgian companies employ less than 50 people with 83% having less than 10 employees. SMEs generate more than 70% of GDP and their share in the total added-value of the economy amounts to 28.7%. Belgian SMEs are also mainly family owned and the number of independent companies amounts to 543,000.

¹ The Belgium RDP regions are: Wallonia and the Flanders

The agricultural industry in Belgium has evolved to become a very powerful sector, with productivity ranked amongst the highest in Europe. In Flanders, explorations have an average size of 18.8 ha and are mainly directed towards the more intensive means of production (e.g. horticulture). In Wallonia, where agriculture tends to be more extensive, explorations incorporate an average surface area of 45.6 ha. In this region, dairy farms, the breeding of cattle and field crops (cereals, sugar beet, etc.) are prevalent. Although agriculture occupies less than 2% of the active population, it remains an important area of economic activity, as well as engaging about half of Belgium's land surface. Its impact on the evolution of the Belgian rural landscape is therefore considerable. During the agricultural census of 2006, Belgium counted 49,307 farms and horticultural explorations which occupied 1,369,000 ha. Most of the agricultural companies in Belgium are family owned and employ few people. Succession is not ensured in many families and counts as one of the main reasons for the considerable decline of these companies.

Production conditions in the agricultural sector also vary according to area. In the north of the country (i.e. Campine in Flanders), sandy grounds dominate. The nature of the ground explains the prevalence of meadows in these areas. In addition, a considerable amount of ground is used for the cultivation of maize. In southern parts of Flanders, clay-sand grounds are common and so cultivation generally dominates. The average size of the surface of the explorations, very limited in Flanders, denotes an intensive culture. Consequently, many companies linked to intensive bovine breeding are based in this clay-sand area. Thus, agricultural production is varied in Flanders, of which, the breeding of milk cows and pigs in Campine and in the sandy area of Flanders offer specific examples. The production structure is more homogeneous in Wallonia. In this muddy area, the average surface area owned by agricultural companies is greater and the ground is fertile, which explains the prevalence of field crops (wheat, sugar beets). In the south-east, the stony ground, high altitude and more accentuated relief are less favourable to production. Therefore, agriculture in this area focuses primarily on bovine breeding.

The efficient production and use of renewable energy within agriculture is still marginal but the modern nature of Belgian agriculture is apparent in other areas. For example, the education level of farmers is relatively high; in 2000, 41.9% were educated to a basic level. However, Belgian agriculture, in common with the rest of the European Union, faces a myriad of difficulties. The average revenue for farmers remains lower than that of workers in other sectors and the intensification and mechanisation of agriculture demands raised levels of investment, which can be problematic for farmers in the event of falling prices.

It is difficult to clearly identify rural areas in Belgium because of the country's strong population density and the phenomena of "ruralbanisation" (the blending of urban and rural areas). This is more evident in Flanders than in Wallonia. Generally, rural areas in Belgium do not have many problems in terms of mobility or low population density but, they do encounter challenges in terms of competition for occupancy of the same land (the often difficult coexistence of rural and neo-rural interests).

In terms of industry in Belgium, the agricultural food sector occupies an important place:

- It accounts for 9% (€15,640 million in 2004) of exports;
- The added-value generated by the sector rose to €5,759.6 million in nominal terms, approximately 13% of the total GVA generated by the manufacturing industry;
- It accounts for approximately 87,900 workers, approximately 14.6% of total industrial employment.

These figures show the agribusiness sector as being one of the most important areas within

manufacturing in Brussels, according to criterion used. The sector enjoys high productivity (€60.7 million of GVA) but it should be noted that it is more developed in the Flemish region than in Wallonia.

The forestry sector provides, as a whole, some 60,000 direct and indirect jobs in Belgium. The surface area of Belgian forests is increasing (they represent 670,000 ha) but the situation varies greatly between the north and the south of the country. The Belgian forest heritage is one of the most important in Europe with an average annual increase of 6.3 m³/ha. The primary processing of the wood sector is well represented in Wallonia whereas the secondary processing sector is especially developed in the Flemish area.

Belgium has very high population densities and is located at the 'crossroads' of Western Europe. Therefore, both the environment and agricultural soils come under considerable pressures. In terms of the majority of indicators, Belgium's results can be deemed 'poor'. However, it has recorded good performances in the areas of municipal urban waste management and in terms of answering the problem of freight transport. Air pollution by ozone is a matter which deserves special attention in Belgium.

This chapter offers an overview of the socio-economic situation in Belgium as a whole. Firstly, decision-making power does not belong exclusively to the Federal Government and the Federal Parliament. The country's management is run by various regional authorities exerting some of their competences in an autonomous way, e.g. agricultural and rural development management. Therefore, we focus here on the agricultural and rural development as they pertain to two Belgian regions: the Flemish region (on the north) and Wallonia region (on the south).

Flanders has a population of about 6 million people, covering a territory of 13,522 km² of flat to undulating land. It is located in the northern part of Belgium with about 41% of its population residing in peri-urban areas (particularly Brussels). One quarter of the land area serves urban functions and the remaining three quarters can be characterised as squattered open space. The main socio economic strengths of rural areas include the fact that farmers are well educated and productivity is above average (1.5% of the production is from only 0.5% of the land). Further strengths include the relatively high added value in agriculture. In what is effectively a dual approach, there are two main types of farms: those engaged in conventional farming and those who have diversified into other areas, for example tourism and on-farm sale of produce involving people who need care etc.

Wallonia has a population of 3.4 million inhabitants, comprising a territory of 16,844 km². In terms of demographics, 25% of the population are less than 20 years old, 15% are more than 65 years and 51.5% are women. Located in the southern part of Belgium the region is divided into five provinces and borders France, Luxembourg, Germany and the Netherlands. The density of population is 201 inhabitants per km² and 50% of the population live in rural areas. The regional GDP per capita is below the Belgian average (-27.1%) and 13.8% below the European average. The unemployment rate is 12% in 2004 and affects many young people (33,1%). The primary sector represents 17,000 agricultural holdings and 0.75 million ha of cultivated land (45% of the Walloon territory) of which 57% are fodder crops. Some 37% of its utilised agricultural area (UAA) consists of Less Favoured Areas (LFAs) and forest areas represent 32% of the territory. Agriculture employs over 2% of the active population, representing a decline since 1992 (-34%). Agro-industry is quite diversified and accounts for a significant proportion of very small and medium sized enterprises. In Wallonia migration from towns to urban areas is common. This introduces a new dynamism as well as financial resources to rural communities, but it also poses problems; with the rural economy and

employment no longer dependent on the primary sector it becomes marginalized even within rural communities.

Rural development challenges

In Flanders, the number of farms is decreasing and some 50% are managed on a part-time basis. The contribution of the agricultural sector to the national economy is considerable but farm incomes are less than other areas of economic activity. With the high levels of inputs applied in farming, emissions are considerable as well, with loss of nutrients, reduction of soil organic matter and soil erosion. Biodiversity is also decreasing. Unemployment in rural areas is a major problem, in particular in so far as it affects young people. However, a considerable number of people living in rural areas are unofficially engaged in some sort of economic activity. With the exception of cultural facilities, the level of social services in rural areas is generally considered sufficient but lags behind in smaller villages. Public transport is less than adequate in some areas also. In terms of rural land usage, 11% of the region is covered by forests with about 50% of the land area used for farming (59% fodder crops, 32% arable crops and 8% horticulture crops). Farmers are well educated and productivity is above the EU average: 1.5% of the production involves use of only 0.5% of the land.

There is scope for improvement in relation to certain aspects of rural development in the region. Wallonia has failed to capitalise on regional innovation potential and the introduction of new technologies in the agricultural production system. Consequently, productivity has been adversely affected and revenues compare unfavourably with other areas of economic activity. There is an apparent lack of incentives to attract (and hold) young farmers and an over reliance on CAP funding. Increasingly exigent standards effectively constrain small businesses. Problems also exist in terms of rural identity and rural/neo-rural relations. On the other hand, Wallonia has some distinct advantages, which it is intended will find support through the RDP, including: the potential for the development of organic farming, lower rural unemployment rates than exist in urban areas and a respect for standards imposed by Directive 91/676/C EE. Pre-existing strategies for rural development have been put in place with moderate success and these can be built upon. Population demand for, and receptiveness to changes as well as the diversity of production, services and activities are also positive.

The economic, social and environmental situation in Wallonia contains both weaknesses and opportunities. Based on these and other issues consistent with the strategic community, priorities set by the Wallonia Government for the rural development program relate to maintaining sustainable agricultural activity in Wallonia, particularly in rural areas. To achieve these objectives, the strategy will focus on three areas:

- Improving the competitiveness of agriculture and forestry by helping its adaption to changes imposed by market conditions and society expectations;
- Strengthening the potential for mutually beneficial links between agriculture / forestry; and
- Supporting a dynamic and vibrant rural community, enhancing the attractiveness of rural areas by improving the living environment and creating jobs.

The Flemish countryside is characterised by a good quality of life for all actors in a strongly urbanised environment with the multifunctional use of land, in which agriculture is significant in terms of the use of open space. Through sustainable investment in the different functions of the countryside, its position and importance are reinforced. New opportunities are thus created which determine its structure and identity (sustainable agriculture and horticulture, rural heritage, environment, forestry, nature, landscape...). The Flemish agricultural sector

produces quality products in a sustainable manner, for instance, ongoing conversion to sustainable agriculture, including organic farming; it uses renewable raw materials, aims for maximum conservation of biodiversity and is economically sustainable. The professionalism within the agricultural sector is recognised and supported, where it operates in a multifunctional and collaborative capacity. With this in mind, a mission has been defined for each axis, and strategic objectives have been set. In addition, three horizontal strategic objectives were established:

- Agricultural entrepreneurship is encouraged through the continuous exchange and building of knowledge in order to achieve maximum transparency and cooperation;
- The management of the RDP guarantees the optimal allocation of resources and measures as well as maximum mutual coordination with other Flemish policy initiatives; and
- The RDP is making a considerable contribution to the sustainable development of the countryside, including a sustainable spatial development.

Belgium national strategic objectives

Responsibility for agriculture and rural development policy in Belgium was gradually attributed to the regions themselves (through the Special Law of Institutional Reform, August 8th, 1980, and modified by the laws of August 8th, 1988 and May 15th and July 16th, 1993). The final phase of the relevant federal reform saw the adoption of the Special Law of 13th July, 2001. Consequently federal authorities do not exert any further competences in these matters except for: (1) the safety of the food chain - control of animal products, determination and control of standards relating to the hygiene standards of raw materials and products of vegetable and animal origin; (2) the determination and control of standards relating to the health and the wellbeing of the animals; (3) measures relating to the distribution of funds in the event of an anticipated suspension of activity by old farmers; (4) the distribution of European assistance.

National Strategic Plan for Belgium includes the priorities for Flanders and Wallonia. These are as follows:

- **Flanders**
 - Support the economic viability of farms through diversification, the minimising of risks and promotion of multifunctional land use;
 - Promote quality throughout the agro-food sector taking the environment, animal wellbeing and social acceptance into consideration;
 - Accelerate the broadening of the range of activities and promote the transition to biological farming;
 - Assist farmers to improve the natural quality of farmland and other designated areas (reserves);
 - Elaborate further on sustainable forestry policies;
 - Increase the economic importance of rural areas through the diversification of the rural economy and the promotion of multifunctional land use;
 - Improve quality of life in rural villages with special emphasis on the integration of susceptible groups;
 - Redirect water management to ensure higher levels of sustainability;
 - The RDP strategy (following the CAP Health Check) also takes into account the current economic crisis and the multiple impacts it has had on various agricultural sectors. As a result, Flanders proposes to allocate new resources in order deliver economic support to those sectors.

- **Wallonia**

Below are presented the priorities for each axis on the Walloon strategy. These priorities will be achieved through secondary objectives which are detailed in this fiche.

- encourage the creation of value added in the agriculture and forestry, and business processing and marketing of agricultural and forestry by encouraging the improvement of quality, innovation and diversification;
- improve the recovery of agricultural and forestry by encouraging their transformation through agribusiness development and enhancement of all products of agriculture and forestry in bioenergy;
- enable farmers and agribusiness firms to adapt quickly to changing environment and improve their working conditions;
- encourage skills development and training;
- encourage complementarity of agriculture and forestry with the environment;
- preserve and develop areas of high natural value;
- halting biodiversity;
- contribute to achieving the objectives of the framework directive on water and climate change mitigation;
- create economic activities and jobs in rural areas by supporting the diversification and development of non-agricultural activities;
- improve overall quality of life in rural areas through the establishment of local services, trans-communal partnerships and the development and revitalization of heritage buildings and natural areas;
- develop and implement local development strategies;
- improve governance and mobilize the endogenous development potential of rural areas.

RDP amendments

Taking into account the additional financing provided by the CAP Health Check, the European Economic Recovery Package (EERP) and Modulation, greater strategic priority is given to the new challenges noted above, although these differ between the two regions:

- Wallonia – strategic priority is being given to initiatives that contribute to water management (37%), climate change mitigation and adaptation (25%), biodiversity (25%) and additional support for the restructuring of the dairy sector (13%);
- Flanders – places additional emphasis on climate change, water management, renewable energy, biodiversity and the restructuring of the dairy sector. Flanders decided to reinforce existent measures (particularly measures 121 and 311) instead of creating new ones due to the fact that EU funding was lower than expected. No additional measures related to the development of broadband access were implemented, since it was evaluated that the Flanders territory was already well provided for (70% of it has an internet connection and 60% with broadband).

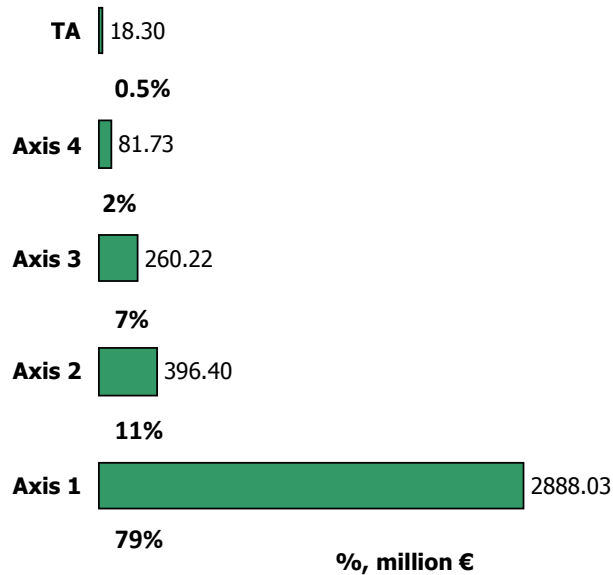
In Belgium, additional funding is available to implement the 'new challenges' as a result of the 2009 amendments. The additional total budget amount was €123,276,380 (€68,474,000 EAFRD and €54,802,380 national/regional public funding). In Flanders, these funds will not only assist with new environmental challenges (i.e. climate change mitigation, water management, renewable energies, etc.) but will serve to assist producers in the dairy sector to adapt to market changes following the abolition of the milk quotas. In Wallonia, these new funds will primarily assist dairy producers.

Expected outcomes of the policy

In Belgium, quantified targets and objectives, and the indicators to be used, have been defined at the RDP (i.e. regional) level and not as part of the Belgian Rural Development National Strategy Plan. As such, each regional RDP contains individual targets related to perceived socio-economic and environmental outcomes as well as those relating to 'new challenges'. For example, for both regions 'impact indicators' include:

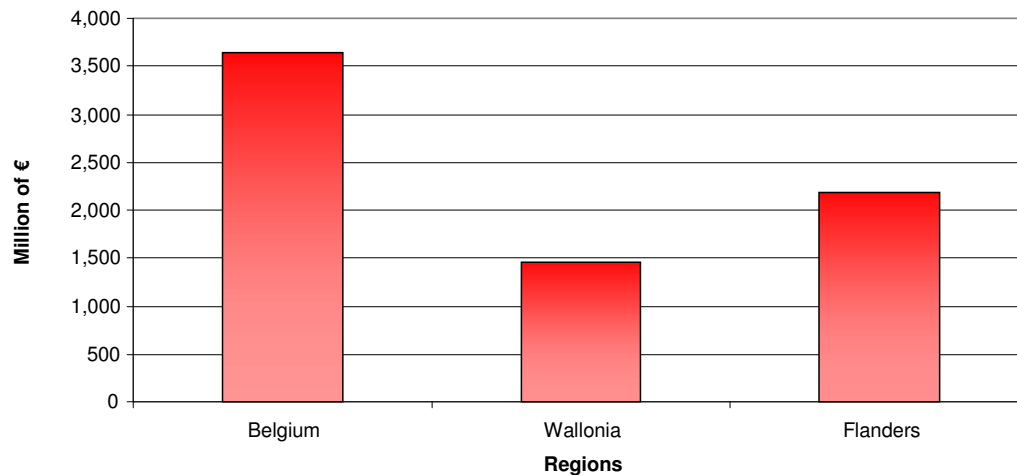
- **Flanders**
 - Contributing to combating climate change and protection of the environment:
 - Axis 1 - reduce carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄) and nitrous oxide (N₂O) emissions (561 participants and €56,900,000 invested);
 - Axis 1 - secure the progressive replacement of fossil fuels with agricultural biomass as a way to produce renewable energy (23 participants and €11,750,000 invested);
 - Axis 3 - build infrastructures aimed at producing renewable energy from biomass and other sources of clean energy (1000 beneficiaries and €40,000,000 of investment).
 - Improve the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sector
 - Investments being made in the dairy sector (concerning several axes) to assist producers in adapting to changing market conditions and improving competitiveness for milk and dairy products.
 - Protect and improve water quality
 - Axis 1 - improve the efficiency of water usage, storage, quality, etc. (764 participants and €20,140,000 invested);
 - Axis 2 - improve efficiency in waste management (434 contracts and 7290 ha of agricultural surface area affected).
 - Reversing biodiversity decline
 - Axis 2 – protection of fauna and flora (512 contracts and 656 ha of agricultural surface area affected).
- **Wallonia**
 - Improve competitiveness in the agricultural and forestry sectors
 - Axis 1 - increase the number of participants involved in quality production schemes as well as the GVA of subsidised agricultural holdings
 - Axis 1 – double the number of organic farming producers under EU quality schemes.
 - Improve the supply of basic services and create attractive conditions for population permanence/settling
 - Axis 1 - increase the number of those employed from 19,812 in 2003 to 21,000 in 2015 and reduce the fall in farm numbers, from 3.7% between 1999 and 2005 to less than -3% by 2015.
 - Convert "standard" agriculture to organic farming
 - Axis 2 - increase the area under agri-environment measures from 15% of UAA (in 2004) to 20%. The number of agri-environmental contracts may increase from 18,202 in 2005 to 20,000 in 2013. It is expected that the total area successfully managed, which was 90,720 ha in 2005 will increase to 136,000 ha by 2013.
 - Contribute to combating climate change and the protection of the environment

Total country budget breakdown by axis: Total expenditure (including national/regional, EAFRD and private funding) of €3,644,533,496



The RDP budget allocations are broadly divided into four main areas of expenditure, known as axes (namely: axis 1 - Improving the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sector; Improving the environment and the countryside; Quality of life in rural areas and diversification of the rural economy; and Leader). Axis 1 (€2.887 billion) represents 79% of the overall Belgian RDP budget. Axis 2 (€396 million) represents 11% of the overall Belgian RDP budget. Axis 3 (€260 million) represents 7% of the overall Belgian RDP budget. Axis 4 (€81.73 million) represents 2% of the overall Belgian RDP budget and 'technical assistance' (€18.30 million) represents 0.5% of the overall RDP budget.

Regional break down of the country budget



The Belgian regions receive different shares of the funding, with Flanders receiving 60% (€2.190 billion) and Wallonia 40% (€1.454 billion).

Axis Information

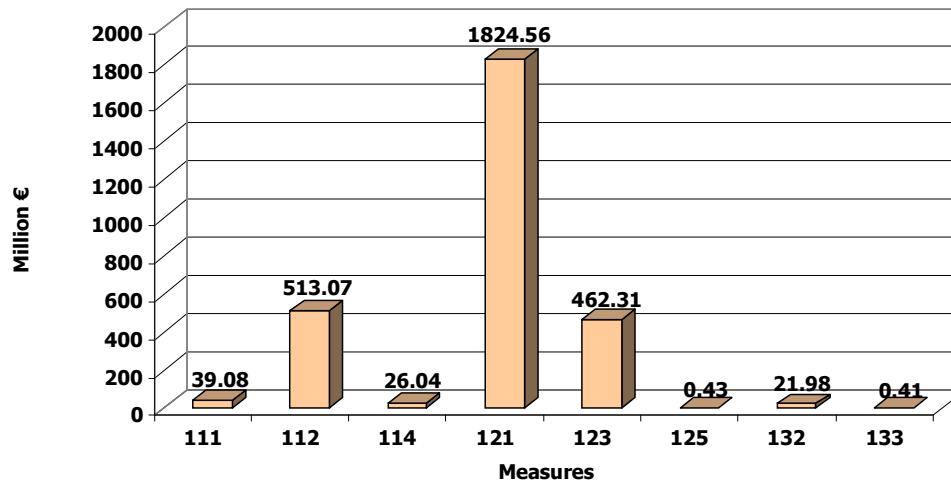
Axis 1 objectives - Improving the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sector

In Belgium, objectives are set at the RDP (i.e. regional) level for both regions:

- **Flanders**
 - Improve education, in particular as it relates to organic farming using awareness of sustainable development programmes, advisory services and financial investments;
 - Increase competitive agricultural production with young farmers identified as a special target group;
 - Encourage young, well educated farmers to be innovative, to increase competitiveness and help sustain the sector;
 - Encourage sustainable investment in the agro-food sector in order to increase rural employment and competitiveness in Flanders; and
 - A special emphasis is placed on adding value to produce and supporting collaborative, innovative product development and marketing.

- **Wallonia**
 - Promote the transferability and the modernization of farms;
 - Promote the creation of value added in agriculture, forestry and food;
 - Strengthen training and information;
 - Enhance performance, including environmental, agricultural and forestry enterprises and improve working conditions within them;
 - Encourage innovation and diversification within farms and agribusinesses;
 - Improve product quality;
 - Promote agro-processing and forestry and encourage the involvement of the primary sector in the development of products.

Axis 1 indicative budget breakdown by measure: Total allocated budget (including regional/national public funds + EAFRD + private funds) of €2,888,035,851



The main emphasis of Belgium's RDP strategies is on axis 1. Particular areas of priority include "new challenges" in terms of the environment and assisting dairy producers to adapt to market changes following the abolition of milk quotas. Three measures in particular receive the bulk of Belgium's axis 1 funding: measure 121- 'modernisation of agricultural holdings' (63% of the axis 1 budget), 112- 'setting up of young farmers' (18%) and 123- 'adding value to agricultural and forestry products' (16%).

Wallonia allocates 47% of its axis 1 budget to measure 121. Flanders also places much emphasis on the modernisation of agricultural holdings, more efficient water management, climate change and renewable energy use (measure 121 and to a less extent measure 123), representing 72% and 11% of the axis total, respectively. The 'rejuvenation of farmers' (measure 112) is also an important aspect of the RDP strategy in both Wallonia (27%) and Flanders (12%).

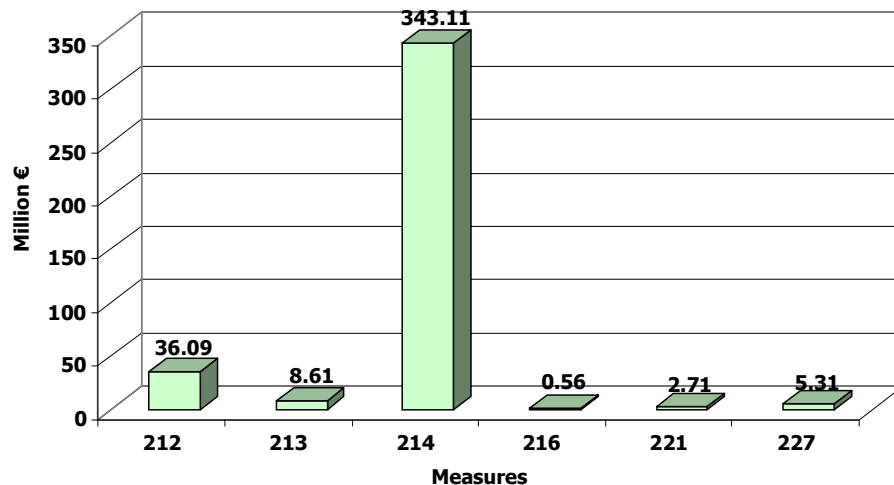
Axis 2 objectives - Improving the environment and the countryside

In Belgium, objectives are set at the RDP (i.e. regional) level for both regions:

- **Flanders**
 - Involve farmers in achieving environmental objectives, especially regarding flora, fauna, habitats (also in Natura 2000 areas) and water (water directive);
 - Support the use of environmentally friendly practices in the management of crops and vegetation (using less agro-chemicals, growing special crops or varieties);
 - Improve water and land management to control erosion, sustain quality and preserve cultural history; and
 - Use gained experience to encourage a shift from conventional farming to biological/sustainable farming.
- **Wallonia**
 - Reinforcing the complementarity between agriculture / forestry and environment, and the multifunctional character of agriculture and forestry;

- Assist in achieving the objectives of the framework directive on water and the Kyoto Protocol;
- Halting the decline of biodiversity;
- Preserving the farmed landscape particularly in disadvantaged areas;
- Promote environmentally sound practices;
- Maintain agriculture in disadvantaged areas;
- Maintain and develop areas of high natural value, especially the Natura 2000 areas.

Axis 2 indicative budget breakdown by measure: Total allocated budget (including regional/national public funds + EAFRD + private funds) of €396,307,494



Funding under axis 2 focuses on agri-environmental schemes, the development of organic farming and “new challenges”. Measure 214- ‘agri-environment payments’ receives the bulk of Belgium’s axis 2 budget (87%). Measure 212- ‘payments to farmers in areas with handicaps, other than mountain areas’ (9%) and measure 213- ‘Natura 2000 payments and those linked to Directive 2000/60/EC’ (2%) receive most of the remaining axis 2 funding.

Wallonia allocates 85% of its axis 2 budget to measure 214. However, while Flanders focuses on issues relating to the dairy sector it also prioritises “new challenges” namely: biodiversity protection, water management, quality protection, etc. In fact, almost 92% of Flanders’ total public expenditure for axis 2 is devoted to this, reflecting the extent to which ‘new challenges’ are seen as a priority in terms of the strategic focus of the programme.

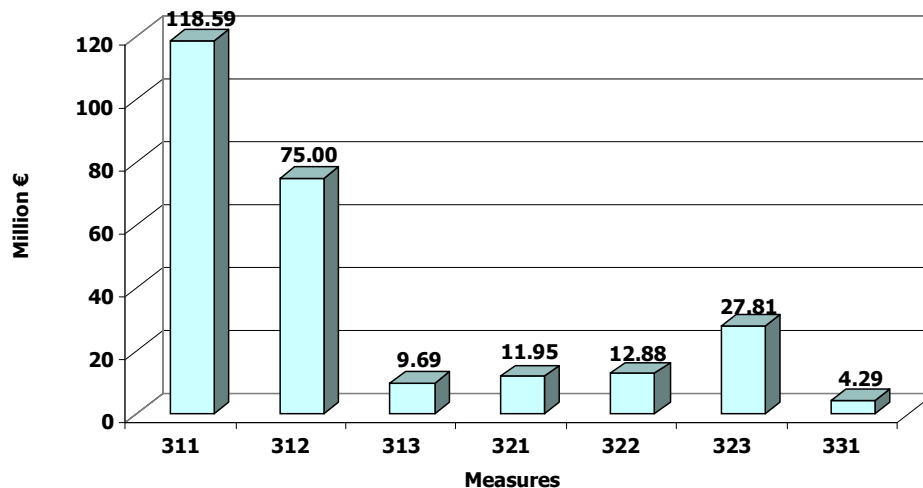
Axis 3 objectives - The quality of life in rural areas and diversification of the rural economy

In Belgium, objectives are set at the RDP (i.e. regional) level for both regions:

- **Flanders**
 - Encourage investment, preserve traditional varieties and combine farming with the provision of healthcare;
 - Set up basic social services (for example those related to culture, leisure, tourism);

- Provide extension services on relevant topics and development of human resources.
- **Wallonia**
 - Creating jobs, particularly in areas highlighting products, agricultural and forestry;
 - Improved quality of life in rural areas;
 - Support the development of non-agricultural and off-farm;
 - Valuation and potency of natural and landscaped;
 - Contribute to accessibility to local services and information technology.

Axis 3 indicative budget breakdown by measure: Total allocated budget (including regional/national public funds + EAFRD + private funds) of €260,219,764



Funding under Axis 3 aims to diversify the rural economy (i.e. develop horse riding activities that may offer a variety of possible uses). Four measures in particular receive the bulk of Belgium's axis 3 funding: measure 311 -'diversification into non-agricultural activities' (46% of Belgium's axis 2 budget), measure 312 -'support for business creation and development' (29%), measure 323- 'conservation and upgrading of the rural heritage' (11%) and measure 321 -'basic services for the economy and rural population' (5%), receive the bulk of the Axis 3 funding. In terms of a regional breakdown of these statistics however, in Wallonia, measure 312 receives the bulk of axis 3 funding (63%) while in Flanders measure 312 receives the greatest share (68%).

Axis 4 objectives - Leader

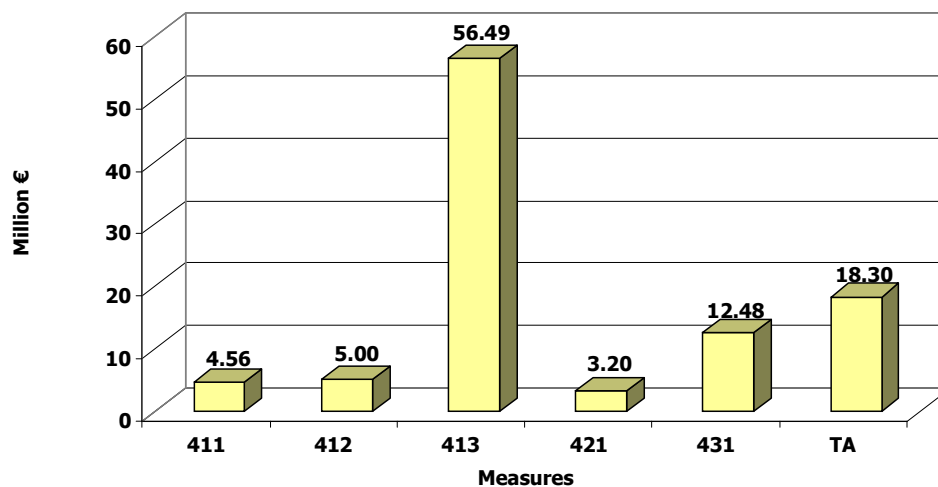
In Belgium, objectives are set at the RDP (i.e. regional) level for both regions:

- **Flanders**
 - Promote a strong regional identity that contributes to a robust regional economy;
 - Identify specific local problems and opportunities;
 - Promote economic diversification, improve social services and the quality of life in rural areas;

- Assist LAGs to function more efficiently;
 - Improve capacities and promote the territory generally;
 - Improve local governance aimed at developing and implementing strategies; and
 - Share experiences with other regions and groups.
- **Wallonia**
 - improve governance and mobilization;
 - endogenous development potential of rural areas;
 - to strengthen local development strategy of LAGs;
 - ensure the socio-economic development of LAG territories;
 - strengthen LAG partnerships, including sustainable mobilization of private partners.

Number of LAGs operational in the RDP areas as of November 2010 was 25.

Axis 4 indicative budget breakdown by measure: Total allocated budget (including regional/national public funds + EAFRD + private funds) of €81,732,146



Most of Belgium's axis 4 budget is allocated to measures 413- 'quality of life/diversification' (69%), measure 431- 'conservation and upgrading of the rural heritage' (15%) and measure 412- 'environment/land management' (6%). Flanders allocates the majority (84%) of its axis 4 budget to measure 413 while Wallonia allots 31.2% to the same measure (413).

The National Rural Network

As in all Member States, the rural development programme incorporates the establishment of a rural network, aimed at facilitating networking and communication between all rural actors.

The Flemish Rural Network has set itself the goal of being the "driving force that generates group dynamics and gets rural areas on the move". Therefore the network was assigned the following:

1. Managing a network of rural actors;

2. Identifying and analysing transferable good practices;
3. Providing information regarding these transferable good practices;
4. Setting up training programmes for LAGs in the process of formation as well as organising the exchange of experience and expertise;
5. Providing technical assistance for inter-territorial and transnational cooperation;
6. Taking part in the European Network for Rural Development (EN RD).

The mission of the Walloon rural network is to :

1. Continue to strengthen collaboration between actors from rural areas and to promote synergies and coherence in the construction of various development strategies and the way in which projects are implemented;
2. Improve the quality of initiatives and promote a more integrated approach;
3. Provide technical assistance for project engineering and cooperation. To facilitate this, tools for research, reflection and communication will be set up to help identify and diffuse information on 'best practice'.
4. Promote the European dimension of the network.

Monitoring and evaluation strategy

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) are considered important management tools for analysing outputs and results and to find out whether or not a programme reaches its target beneficiaries. Financial inputs to the RDP fall under the remit of the disbursing agency. As M&E is a continuous process, remedial action can be taken immediately if required. Indicators for the initial situation, each output, results and the impact of the RDP have been defined according to the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (CMEF). In addition, a few specific indicators have been defined. Progress in terms of implementation is monitored annually and reported to the EC containing both a financial overview and a description of changes, in context. Progress in achieving the strategic objectives is reported bi-annually. The ex-ante evaluation defined the initial situation, the ex-post evaluation summarises final outputs, results and the impact of the programme, whereas the mid-term evaluation offers another opportunity to redirect the programme. A supervisory board plays an important role in overseeing the programme.

Communication and publicity

The main aim of its communication policy is to make the RDP known and to highlight the role of the parties involved. The contribution of the programme to improving the quality of rural life is a central theme. Special target groups include: the general public, prospective beneficiaries and of course current beneficiaries. In the same order, information is becoming more specific. At institutional level the flow of information is to Governmental Organisations (provincial and municipal), socio-economic partners and NGOs. The Rural Network is responsible for providing general information with the Managing Authority responsible for specific information. Tools used to directly disseminate information include: a) dissemination to groups; b) communication like mail, phone calls; and c) the website of the RN for interactive communication. Tools used to passively disseminate information are: a) the website of the Ministry of Agriculture and the website of the Rural Network; b) involvement of local administration and c) providing links to the managing authority. Beneficiaries of the programme use billboards to announce external support to activities.

Annex I – Measures

Axis 1 - Improving the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sector	<i>Promoting knowledge and improving human potential</i>	111	Vocational training and information actions
		112	Setting up of young farmers
		113	Early retirement
		114	Use of advisory services
		115	Setting up of management, relief and advisory services
	<i>Restructuring and developing physical potential and promoting innovation</i>	121	Modernisation of agricultural holdings
		122	Improvement of the economic value of forests
		123	Adding value to agricultural and forestry products
		124	Cooperation for development of new products, processes and technologies in the agriculture and food sector and in the forestry sector
		125	Infrastructure related to the development and adaptation of agriculture and forestry
	<i>Quality of agricultural production and products</i>	126	Restoring agricultural production potential
		131	Meeting standards based on EU legislation
		132	Participation of farmers in food quality schemes
	<i>Transitional measures</i>	133	Information and promotion activities
		141	Semi-subsistence farming
142		Producer groups	
Axis 2 - Improving the environment and the countryside	<i>Sustainable use of agricultural land</i>	143	Providing farm advisory and extension services
		211	Natural handicap payments to farmers in mountain areas
		212	Payments to farmers in areas with handicaps, other than mountain areas
		213	Natura 2000 payments and payments linked to Directive 2000/60/EC
		214	Agri-environment payments
		215	Animal welfare payments
	<i>Sustainable use of forestry land</i>	216	Non-productive investments
		221	First afforestation of agricultural land
		222	First establishment of agroforestry systems on agricultural land
		223	First afforestation of non-agricultural land
		224	Natura 2000 payments
		225	Forest-environment payments
Axis 3 - Quality of life in rural areas and diversification of the rural economy	<i>Diversify the rural economy</i>	226	Restoring forestry potential and introducing prevention actions
		227	Non-productive investments
		311	Diversification into non-agricultural activities
	<i>Improve the quality of life in rural areas</i>	312	Support for business creation and development
		313	Encouragement of tourism activities
		321	Basic services for the economy and rural population
		322	Village renewal and development
<i>Implementing local development strategies</i>	323	Conservation and upgrading of the rural heritage	
	331	Training and information	
	341	Skills-acquisition and animation measure with a view to preparing and implementing a local development strategy	
Axis 4 - Leader	<i>Implementing local development strategies</i>	411	Competitiveness
		412	Environment/land management
		413	Quality of life/diversification
		421	Implementing cooperation projects
		431	Running the local action group, skills acquisition, animation