



# Report of the 9<sup>th</sup> meeting of the European Rural Networks' Assembly

5 October 2022, Brussels

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## Introduction

**9.00 – 10.00**

**Chairman's  
Introduction**

**Mario Milouchev,  
DG AGRI**

Assembly members were welcomed by the Chair to the ninth and final meeting of this Rural Networks' governance body in its current composition. A new Assembly will be established for the new EU CAP Network (see below).

Mr Milouchev explained the meeting had objectives to provide updates and discussion on: the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA) and the outcomes of the Rural Pact Conference; Networking under the future CAP; Rural Networking support and activities; as well as Governance of the EU CAP Network.

The Assembly was reminded about the large number of Rural Networks governance meetings that had taken place since 2015, at EU and national level. They had helped build capacity among many stakeholders in networking and Rural Development Programmes' implementation. The EU Networks' apparatus had also been instrumental in developing the Long-term Vision for Rural Areas and proved helpful in revealing the remarkable power of EIP-AGRI. All experience gained since 2015 will help inform the new EU CAP Network's operations. The new Network will have a broader remit covering both CAP Pillars and sectoral interventions, and will support the CAP's new performance-based delivery model via CAP Strategic Plans (CSP) implementation at the national level.

**Opening remarks**

**Wolfgang  
Burtscher,  
Director-General,  
DG AGRI**

Wolfgang Burtscher, Director-General, DG AGRI then provided opening remarks, recognising the value of the national networks and Assembly for connecting DG AGRI with rural Europe to help facilitate subsidiarity benefits for all stakeholders.

Innovation has been central to the activities of the Networks and to the achievements of the CAP, and opportunities now exist for even more innovation to help Member States take advantage of the new CAP's potential for better balancing EU needs concerning food security, environmental sustainability, and social standards. CSPs are channels for this, and their holistic characteristics help EU countries be ambitious and adopt more integrated approaches based on wider considerations within agri-food systems. DG AGRI is continuing its work with Member States in supporting this level of integration and in maintaining a quality threshold, and this should also increase fairness in CAP payments as well as greening of CSP priorities. Assembly members were encouraged to help all CSPs become operational by the start of 2023. This will help provide farmers and other stakeholders with certainty for maintaining food security and dealing with the current multiple crises faced by rural Europe.

A Q&A session underlined the need for all CSPs to provide a level playing field across Member States. The benefits of involving stakeholders in CSP implementation were also observed. Other statements from Assembly

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	<p>members considered that CSP interventions should be designed as evidenced tools reflecting adequate analysis of demand.</p> <p>Mr Burtscher acknowledged the complexity of balancing different demands within holistic CSPs. Transforming the CAP's production-based background into more of a food systems framework would help reflect the policy's capacity to provide EU citizens with more added value and resilience possibilities such as addressing their needs for energy, health, and biodiversity alongside agri-food products. Innovation was underlined again for its potential to help balance different demands in CSPs.</p> <p>Demands concerning fair CAP support for small farms have to reflect both EU citizens' affinity with these CAP stakeholders and their products, in addition to the value that small farms can provide for EU citizens vis-à-vis maintaining rural populations and protecting rural environments.</p>
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**Update on the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA) and the outcomes of the Rural Pact Conference**

<p><b>10.30 – 11.45</b> LTVRA and Rural Pact update <b>Alexia Rouby, DG AGRI</b></p>	<p>This session included: a presentation from <a href="#">Alexia Rouby, DG AGRI</a> providing an update on the LTVRA and Rural Pact; information from two Member States about related progress; and a series of group discussions on implementing the Rural Pact at national level.</p> <p>The Rural Action Plan adopted with the rural vision contains 24 thematic actions (including flagship actions) and 6 horizontal actions from the European Commission, aiming to help rural Europe be stronger, connected, prosperous, and resilient. The Rural Pact is an initiative to invite other levels of governance and stakeholders to act also towards the vision goals. The Rural Pact conference in June 2022 helped to generate commitments to these goals. The Assembly members heard how rural networks can help foster participation in the Pact.</p> <p>Evagelia Tzoumaka from the Greek Managing Authority programming unit explained how the Rural Pact in Greece will be implemented mainly through the national CSP. A range of regional and local sectors will be involved including transport, education, and health stakeholders. LEADER local development strategies are planned to be influential; covering 90% of the rural territory and containing specific references to LTVRA contributions - such as economic diversification, social cohesion, and environmental sustainability. Greece is keen to learn how other Member States are implementing the Rural Pact.</p> <p>Marija Čupić from the Croatian NRN described how the national CSP will also be the country's main tool for Rural Pact activity. CSP support for LEADER, AKIS, diversification, digitisation, and the new national CAP network are all</p>
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forecast to provide Rural Pact contributions tackling rural residents' concerns about feeling left behind.

In thanking the Assembly members for these country-level insights, the Chair noted that Cohesion funds can also make vital Rural Pact contributions to the rural vision goals. The Commission is due to take stock mid-2023 on how CAP and cohesion funds have been programmed to support rural areas for the new period and issue a public report in 2024 on ways forward. The rural vision cannot be successfully achieved through a single policy.

A Q&A session included feedback from Finland, France, Latvia, and Sweden.

In Finland, the government has a dedicated Rural Policy as well as a Rural Parliament. These will be supporting Rural Pact contributions through actions including rural proofing and a digital rural stakeholders platform.

French feedback promoted an integrated territorial approach for the Rural Pact to achieve cross-sectoral support from farmers and others in the rural economy.

Latvia echoed Greece's request for more information on how other Member States are implementing the Rural Pact and Sweden informed the Assembly about a knowledge exchange event on this topic being planned for May next year. The Chair pointed to examples in the EC Communication about how Member States are preparing to implement the Rural Pact.

Group discussions among Assembly members identified a range of ideas and views about how to promote the Rural Pact at national level. These were (*inter alia*): increasing synergies and harmony between CAP and other support resources; LTVRA aims to be embedded in LEADER local development strategies and higher-level strategies such as national or regional cross-policy action plans; investing effort to involve all stakeholders and facilitate ownership of the process; simplifying the principles and concepts involved by making them S.M.A.R.T; using specific performance indicators; ensuring gender, age, and geographic balance; alignment with Farm to Fork targets; optimising opportunities for Smart Villages; involving non-EU funds from the public and private sectors; bridging infrastructure gaps; sharing more information and guidance through different media (e.g. podcasts and video); reflecting the holistic role of agri-food systems in making rural Europe an attractive place to live, work, and visit.

Update on networking under the future CAP & Update on Rural Networking support and activities

**11.45 – 13.00**  
Update on framework for

As the Head of Unit in DG AGRI responsible for the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) the EIP-AGRI Network that will soon merge into the new EU CAP Network, Antonia Gamez Moreno explained that her unit (D1) is also responsible for the LTVRA, the Rural Pact, and the Broadband

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networking under  
the future CAP  
**Antonia Gamez  
Moreno, DG AGRI**

Update on Rural  
Networking  
support and  
activities

Competence Offices network, stressing the importance of ensuring synergies between all these different and yet connected initiatives and work strands.

Subsidiarity can be enhanced by the networks' ability to act as channels connecting rural Europe with the Commission services and vice versa. The existing networks also connect Member State peers and the new EU CAP Network will further facilitate the sharing of capacity building knowhow between its stakeholders.

DG AGRI has contracted four consortia of expert support to help collectively deliver the new EU CAP Network services and D1 is coordinating the four teams (called Lots). These are: the CAP Implementation Contact Point (Lot 1); the Support Facility for Innovation and Knowledge exchange including EIP-AGRI (Lot 2); the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP (Lot 3); and a fourth team responsible for the Network's event logistics and communication tools such as the website and social media (Lot 4). Continuity with the previous ENRD and EIP-AGRI contractors (three out of four Lots) will take advantage of previous experience and help foster a smooth transition.

The main novelty of the new EU CAP Network is its wider scope than the ENRD and EIP-AGRI network. It covers both CAP Pillars and more coordination with other Commission Services will also help strengthen and extend networking opportunities. CAP stakeholders are encouraged to work together with DG AGRI to co-create the EU CAP Network and reinforce its ability to help Member States achieve the new CAP's objectives. The Team Leaders of the four consortia then presented summaries of recent and planned activities.

A presentation by [Lot 1 Team Leader, David Lamb](#), drew attention to the Contact Point's current and forthcoming work across both CAP Pillars addressing three main objectives designed to: foster a resilient farm sector; bolster environment and climate; as well as strengthen the fabric of rural areas. Examples of this activity were spotlighted such as Thematic Groups covering the Organics Supply Chain, and Landscape Features & Biodiversity. A regular supply of good practices and publications continue to be produced covering a wide range of CAP topics. The Contact Point also continues to organise events such as the forthcoming Forum on Best Practices in the Agri-Food Supply Chain, workshop on Advancing gender equality in rural areas, and NRN meetings (including monthly online gatherings of NRN clusters in the Nordic-Baltic, Central-Eastern European, Atlantic, and Mediterranean zones).

[Lot 2 Team Leader Pacôme Elouna Eyenga](#) outlined his team's role in sharing knowledge, tackling challenges, and connecting people through a helpdesk, focus groups, networking events, cross-visits, analytical work, and related communications. He summarised figures showing the numbers of EIP-AGRI stakeholders and stressed the importance of linking researchers with agri-food and other rural sectors. Examples of priority topics in the new EIP-AGRI

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Annual Work Programme refer to resource management, animal and plant health, ecological land use, new avenues for rural growth, AKIS, and cross-border networking of Operational Groups.

[Lot 3 Team Leader, Hannes Wimmer](#), gave an overview of the Evaluation Helpdesk's thematic priorities for capacity building, guidance, and new evidence-based/ analytical tasks. Work is underway on the development of an Animal welfare impact indicator, a synthesis of CSP ex-ante evaluations, cataloguing of CAP interventions and the mapping and analysis of Member States' CSPs, and preparation of guidance for the evaluation plan and the assessment of AKIS. An assessment of the POSEI scheme is planned along with analysis of LEADER's costs and benefits, which will start soon. The assessment of direct payments will be the subject of a good practice workshop in November 2022. Assembly members were invited to make use of the Evaluation Helpdesk's communication channels to get involved and be inspired by the Evaluation Knowledge Bank.

A presentation by [Lot 4 Team Leader Nicolas Esgain](#) clarified his teams' responsibilities for the EU CAP Network's communication products, event logistics, the EU CAP Network's Brussels premises managed by his team, and overall branding. Lot 4's mission is to connect CAP communities, simplify knowledge-sharing, strengthen partnerships, and gain higher involvement. Online communication will be central for this mission and an initial version of the [EU CAP Network website](#) is already operational. New social media profiles are also now launched on LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube with official hashtags for the network (#EUCAPNetwork) and its launch campaign (#BloomTogether). Member State stakeholders were commended for their potential to act both as multipliers of the Network's outputs and providers of content to be shared throughout the Network.

A Q&A session took note of the new Network's broader remit and its support for specific target groups including LAGs and Operational Groups. The relevance of network clusters, multi-lingual actions, and collaboration with other EU funding sources were also mentioned. A suggestion was tabled to consider an EU network of CAP communication experts.

### Governance of the EU CAP Network

**14.30 – 15.00**  
**Governance of the EU CAP Network**  
**Tatjana Borbas, DG AGRI**

Tatjana Borbas, DG AGRI presented an overview of the [EU CAP Network Governance](#). This provided information about the Commission Implementing Decision ((EU) 2022/1864 of 5 October 2022) regarding the organisational structure and operation of the new EU CAP Network.

Arrangements and roles for the new Assembly, Steering group, and permanent subgroups were described. Membership nomination and selection processes for the new Assembly will start in Q4 of 2022. NGOs selected into the new Civil Dialogue Groups in matters covered by the CAP

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will be involved. The first meeting of the EU CAP Network Assembly is envisaged for Q1 2023. Agreement on the suggested permanent subgroups and Assembly's representatives in the Steering group will advance thereafter.

A Q&A session followed the presentation and the exchange confirmed that Member States' permanent representatives would receive invitations and nomination instructions for the new Assembly. There is a possibility to elaborate provisions for rotating members in the governance structure. Information about new framework for Civil Dialogue Groups is available in the Commission Decision (EU) 2022/1368 of 3 August 2022.

This Q&A session also attracted praise for the previous activities of EU Rural Networks and credited the role of networking in building institutional capacity at Member State level.

A common communication approach was proposed for EU and national levels to explain the scope and opportunities from networking CAP stakeholders. Benefits were noted for communication products designed to be easily translated into different languages.

#### Next steps & Closing remarks

**15.00– 15.30**  
**Next steps &**  
**Closing remarks**  
**Mario Milouchev,**  
**DG AGRI**

The Chair opened the floor for Assembly members to publicise relevant activities. Responses summarised outcomes of the recent European Rural Parliament conference and highlighted forthcoming events on the CAP's Green Architecture and Rural Pact contributions in mountain areas.

Mr Milouchev thanked the Assembly members for their participation throughout the past period and looked forward to the new opportunities from CAP networking. The importance was reiterated for Member States to have CSPs approved in time to avoid bottlenecks in the disbursement of CAP funds. Members were encouraged to sustain the momentum driving the Rural Pact and LTVRA.

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