



ENRD webinar

## First Thematic Group meeting

### Highlights report

The new [ENRD Thematic Group \(TG\)](#) will not only explore how rural areas and the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) can contribute to [European Green Deal](#) (EGD) objectives, but also how the EGD and its various actions can help rural areas become more resilient and vibrant, taking ownership of the relevant actions.

The first meeting steered the TG's future work towards thinking how rural areas can best benefit from the shift to fully sustainable agricultural and forestry practices. This includes how to reduce nutrient leakages and identifying the role of rural areas in delivering the Clean Energy Package. The group will share ideas and experiences to help EU Member States (MS) design CAP Strategic Plans (CSP) that effectively deliver on these EGD targets and on broader rural development.

#### Event Information

**Date:** 28 September 2020

**Location:** Webinar

**Organisers:** ENRD Contact Point

**Participants:** RDP Managing Authorities, national rural networks, Local Action Groups, EU institutions, farmers' associations, environmental and nature conservation organisations, advisory services.

**Outcomes:** Orientation for the specific topics of the Thematic Group.

**Web page:** [1st meeting of the ENRD Thematic Group on European Green Deal and Rural Areas](#)

### Key EGD policies with relevance to rural areas



[Kaley Hart](#) (ENRD/IEEP) showed how the EGD outlines a set of policy objectives around sustainability and economic growth. Rural areas play an important role in these objectives and are also impacted by many of them, including the [Farm to Fork](#) (F2F) Strategy, the [EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030](#), climate and energy initiatives, the [Circular Economy Action Plan](#), and the upcoming EU Forestry Strategy. These policy areas often interlink with rural activities. The CAP is an important policy lever and source of financing to help steer rural activities towards the EGD objectives. Certain targets set out in the F2F and Biodiversity strategy – such as extending organic cultivation to 25% of the EU's total agricultural area, reducing chemical pesticides by 50%, or reducing nutrient losses by 50% – are to be reflected in the CSPs. The TG should aim to identify effective support approaches that go beyond land management and contribute to increased rural resilience, addressing value chains and local rural communities.

#### A Local Action Group's experience



[Bart Soldaat](#) ([LEADER Holland Rijnland](#), NL) drew attention to the regional specificities in rural environmental challenges. The densely populated, low-lying areas in the Western Netherlands face an imminent challenge with the rising sea level and the risk of adverse soil-impacts from long-term drainage. The LAG sees climate action as the EGD's priority deliverable.

#### An environmental organisation's perspective



Magda Jentgena ([Pasaules Dabas Fonds](#), LV) highlighted the loss of biodiversity as a very pressing issue for rural areas. The EGD could promote a robust regulatory system with transparent and fair support for rural businesses that act sustainably. The EGD objectives should not be diluted by divergent lobbying.

### Brief introduction to CAP and EGD environmental and climate objectives



[Mike Mackenzie](#) (DG AGRI) noted that various documents have a bearing on the future direction of the CAP in the context of the EDG, including the [EGD Communication](#), the EC [Working Document](#) on links between the CAP and the EGD and the [F2F Communication](#). Before the draft CSPs are officially submitted, the EC will make 'Recommendations' to MS about points of focus within CSPs in relation to the nine future CAP objectives, in light of the EGD. The Recommendations process is intended to influence CSP design through bilateral discussions. This process will not replace the "bottom-up" approach to CSP design, nor will the EC "impose" pre-determined national targets in the CSPs for EGD goals: rather, the EC will ask MS to explicitly set targets for themselves in relation to selected EU-level EGD targets. The Recommendations will be an input alongside MS' SWOT analyses - which will in any case reflect some of same real-world problems as the EGD - as well as the proposed formal links between the CAP and EU environmental and climate legislation. The new green architecture of the CAP provides MS with a lot of flexibility to tailor CAP instruments to their specific needs.

## Discussion outcomes on selected EGD targets and broader rural development



### Reducing chemical inputs in agriculture

- Learning and knowledge exchange, e.g. demonstration farms and peer-to-peer exchanges, are effective in translating information into action;
- Cooperation between farmers is needed to achieve changes in scale and to facilitate related steps for individual farmers, e.g. sharing expensive precision machinery;
- The ability of farmers and other CAP beneficiaries to understand and measure the environmental impacts of their actions is essential;
- The TG should identify approaches that effectively help the scaling up of good practices.



### Increasing EU's total organic area

- Rural actors need to understand the broader potential benefits of the organic transition for their area, both in terms of improved environmental conditions and the positive impact on sectors such as rural tourism;
- More support could be directed towards more collective action where feasible;
- Farmers' cooperation and consumers' collaboration are beneficial for boosting organic value chains;
- The buy-in and ownership of a shift to sustainable production requires adequate understanding of socio-economic and environmental gains for all stakeholders – particularly at local level.



### Clean Energy shift in rural areas

- In agriculture, the package means reducing energy use while contributing to the increased use of and production of renewable energy, leading to increasing and diversifying rural income;
- Stakeholders from the local, regional and national levels need to coordinate the support and avoid top-down approaches;
- The mapping of stakeholders' needs and resources, together with a 'broker in innovation on energy transition – e.g. a local government, advisory service, or other institution – are important enabling elements;
- Not an isolated topic, the energy shift should be looked at as part of larger transition including climate action, bioeconomy, etc.

## Economic and environmental sustainability on Černelič farm



Zvone Černelič and his family, winners of the popular vote of the Rural Inspiration Awards 2020, [presented](#) their [organic and biodynamic farm](#) in Slovenia. Over 30 varieties of vegetables and strawberries are grown mostly in greenhouses and sold on markets in the capital, to schools and at the farm shop. The farm uses compost, green manure crops and no-till cultivation to increase soil organic content and microbes in vegetable production. It refrains from chemical pesticides and its herd of 40 cattle are able to graze outside for eight months per year. These practices contribute to preserving biodiversity, retaining water and nutrients and sequestering carbon in the soil. The know-how acquired in practice and from other farmers is a key to economic sustainability. The farm has been involved in numerous study visits and information exchange activities.

## Orientations for further TG work

### Topics



The [background paper](#) suggests that the TG could focus on EGD targets that link to broader rural development aspects. TG participants voted during the meeting for their most useful topics. Options in the vote included: *the transition to sustainable agricultural and forestry practices that preserve biodiversity; approaches to reduce nutrient losses and the use of fertilisers while supporting sustainable and resilient rural economies; and promoting rural areas' contribution to the Clean Energy Package*. The vote revealed a clear preference for the first option. Community engagement and local governance aspects, agricultural extension services and practice-science collaboration were suggested as common themes.

### Audience and outputs



The TG's main audience are the authorities involved in the CSP design and implementation. Rural stakeholders are an important audience for TG members to reach out to. TG outputs produced in English can inspire the creation of national knowledge products. Sofia Björnsson ([LRF](#)) explained how the Swedish National Rural Network will disseminate to its national audience examples of rural climate actions from MS, developed in the previous ENRD TG.

Participants confirmed the usefulness of practical cases, examples of win-win collaborations and suggestions for CSP intervention models. Factsheets, video materials and an online exchange platform for TG members were identified as possible useful outputs.



This new TG continues the ENRD's work on the environmental priorities for the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development. Previous thematic work has focused on [bioeconomy and climate action](#), sustainable management of [soil and water](#), rural [resource efficiency](#), and on the [transition to green economies](#) in rural areas.