



ENRD webinar

22nd NRN meeting

Highlights report

The 22nd NRN meeting, co-organised with the Austrian Network Support Unit (NSU), took place in person in Kufstein, Tyrol, Austria on 5 May. The meeting was followed by project visits on 6 May 2022.


The meeting, which was the first face to face event for over two years, provided the space to discuss and take stock of lessons learned and networking best practices from the current programming period that can be used in the future national CAP Networks. The event also explored the new role of NRNs in implementing Agriculture Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) under CAP Strategic Plans (CSPs) and allowed for peer-to-peer exchanges on how AKIS is understood in different Member States (MS). The meeting also provided participants with updates on the new rural networking activities at national and European level.


The meeting was complemented with a field trip on 6 May organised by the Austrian NSU after the NRN meeting. This provided an occasion to visit EAFRD-funded projects in the area around Kufstein, namely the e-car-sharing project '[Beecars](#)', the gorge '[Klobensteinschlucht](#)' and the eco-cheese production [Walchsee](#).

Setting the Scene



The meeting was opened by the new Team Leader of the ENRD Contact Point (CP), David Lamb, who introduced the objectives of the day, namely to take stock of lessons learned from the previous programming period, to provide update on ongoing rural networking activities and to discuss the role of the future CAP networks in implementing AKIS.

 Martin Leitner from the Austrian Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Regions, and Tourism underlined the importance of including AKIS in the agenda to stimulate discussions on how to progress networking within the next rural framework. [Karl Bauer](#) from the Austrian NSU presented the targets of the network which lay in strengthening the involvement of stakeholders in rural areas and enabling networking.

 Giuliana Keller from DG AGRI welcomed the participants on behalf of the European Commission and the Unit D1 'Rural areas and Networks' which is looking after the ENRD CP activities and EIP-AGRI Support Facility, the Long-term Vision for rural areas and the European Broadband Competence Offices Network. Currently, the main priorities have been assessing the network section of the CSPs through the observation letters as well as preparing for the governance structure of the new EU CAP Network, organise the [Rural Pact Conference](#) (15-16 June 2022) and the launch event of the new EU CAP Network (expected to be in October 2022).

An ice-breaking activity followed where participants were asked to share the latest priorities of their own national network.

Event Information

Date: 5 May 2022

Location: Austria, Kufstein

Organisers: ENRD Contact Point and the Austrian NSU

Participants: 59 NRN representatives from 24 Member States

Outcomes: An opportunity to learn from the past work of NRNs and plan for the future CAP Networks; better understanding of how AKIS is implemented in different Member States and peer-to-peer support in developing its implementation.

Web page: <https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/22nd-nrn-meeting-networking-back-together-taking-stock-success-and-looking-en>



Taking stock of lessons learned from the current programming period



A panel discussion with representatives of each of the four NRN clusters, Maria Gustafsson (Swedish NSU), Michael Fischer (Austrian NSU), Xavier Delmon (Walloon NSU) and Zorana Cetinic (Croatian NSU), highlighted important elements to take into consideration regarding governance, thematic activities, communication, monitoring and evaluation and LEADER support.

In Sweden, participation levels in governance have increased because of three key factors: Co-ownership among stakeholders, Co-creation that allows stakeholders to co-create their own networking activities, and Co-operation to achieve mutual goals. In Croatia, communication is a strong part of the network with their main target groups reached via a good website and an internal platform and forum. In Belgium, LAGs are supported in their work by being provided with the right tools and skills to prevent unforeseen circumstances. In Austria, annual topics feed into the thematic work such as digitalisation or gender equality. However, in order to include more in-depth topics (such as climate change), a restructuring of the work is needed so that it is possible to follow up on activities that will help present a thorough analysis.

Participants worked in groups to discuss stock-taking on the five distinct topics while exploring what worked well, what were the challenges and what lessons should be considered in the future.

- **Communication:** Some lessons for the future include: using multipliers can help spread the work online; shorter events can create greater engagement; different social media channels should be used to target different groups; it is important to collaborate with stakeholders to share content; and it is smart to target events to the right audience.
- **Governance:** Involving all sectors and stakeholders is important for triggering innovation. The governance process should be open for discussion and should reflect the needs of different actors, while flexibility is needed to engage all the stakeholders/members.
- **LEADER support:** The NRNs role in supporting LEADER proved to be helpful in several different activities such as provision of training and/or guidance on e.g. how to write local development strategies; raising awareness about the LEADER approach among public and farmers as well; creating a safe communication space for LAGs; developing a national LEADER identity, jointly with LAGs.
- **Monitoring and evaluation:** Setting up an evaluation plan and including relevant evaluation questions, which are communicated right from the beginning, is the first step. An adequate number of indicators should reflect the data sources and also the evaluation needs of each country.
- **Thematic activities:** Thematic groups seem to be an effective tool for integrating fragmented stakeholders. Other lessons learned include creating activities together with stakeholders, giving space to participants to talk; and narrowing down the focus of thematic groups which could help to involve specific types of participants.

NRNs and AKIS



[Inge Van Oost](#) from DG AGRI provided an update on AKIS which explained that AKIS is the organisation and interaction of people, organisations and institutions who use and produce knowledge and innovation for agriculture and interrelated fields. The main players of the AKIS are farmers/foresters, advisors, researchers, (farmer) organisations, NGOs, networks, education, retailers, media, services and various Ministries. They all produce and need knowledge which means that efforts should be put in to enhance knowledge flows between the AKIS actors as well as strengthening links between research and practice.

The presentation was followed by an interactive session in which participants considered the role of CAP networks for the AKIS strategic approach in their MSs. The CAP Networks' role was seen in connecting different actors involved in AKIS (e.g. farmers, researchers), many of whom 'speak different languages'.

For all MSs communication and sharing of examples is key. Finland is creating a road map to explain what AKIS is. In Poland, AKIS will be based on M16 (Cooperation) of the current RDP as an entry point, using innovation brokers who are working as advisers in each region. A better reflection is needed in some MSs about which AKIS actors could/should be involved - this will depend in how far (existing) networks and organisations can take part in AKIS interaction in an effective and efficient way. In some MSs the structure of the improved AKIS for the next CAP period is not completely developed as yet.



CAP Networks can help facilitate the effective integration of all actors by acting as a central node in the AKIS web. They should be using clear language and communicating on AKIS and the various AKIS actions (e.g., EIP operational group projects, Horizon multi-actor projects, the available impartial advisors, the trainings, AKIS events and on-farm demonstrations, etc.) through existing networks and mainstream channels such as newspapers, TV, websites etc. Reaching out to young farmers was seen to be important.

Innovation hubs exist in some MSs, where grassroots innovative ideas get help to be developed into EIP Operational Group innovation projects. Finland and other MS are creating a digital platform as a place to capture all the knowledge in one place. Attention is needed for such platforms to ensure they are developed to be interoperable with the EU knowledge reservoir for practice (Farmbook) and the EIP website. Respecting specific IT standards is essential for this, and then all information at the EU level can systematically be downloaded and translated to the national knowledge platforms.

Rural Networking Update

An update on rural networking activities at the EU level was given by [Eirini Litina](#), [Veronika Korcekova](#) and [David Lamb](#) from the ENRD CP in which they shared information about the Rural Inspiration Awards 2022, the collection of Common Network Statistics, the work of NRN clusters and the upcoming Rural Pact Conference.

[Hannes Wimmer](#) and [Valdis Kudins](#) from the ENRD Evaluation Helpdesk gave an update on services offered by the Helpdesk such as the searchable catalogue of MSs CAP interventions and the upcoming guidance on the assessment of AKIS.

Finally, in a recorded message, [Margarida Ambar](#) from the EIP-AGRI Support Facility presented the current priorities and work of EIP-AGRI Support Facility.

In addition to the EU rural networking update, [Juha-Matti Markkola](#) and [Tuomas Metsäniemi](#) from the Finnish NSU shared with others the newly established online platform for connecting Finnish rural actors.

Conclusions and next steps



In closing remarks, Giuliana Keller summarised the meeting's outcomes from DG AGRI's perspective stressing the importance of stock taking to better assess lessons learned and challenges in the evolution of the CAP networks. There are many activities planned at the national and EU level. A great networking value emerged from the NRNs coming together and being proactive in identifying their needs and topics of interest, such as the feedback on CSPs outlined in the observation letters.

The meeting closed with an invitation to the 23rd NRN meeting co-organised by the Dutch NSU planned for September 2022.