

NEWS AND UPDATES

- **MAINSTREAMING THE BIOECONOMY**
- **KEY STEPS FOR CAP STRATEGIC PLANNING**
- **SMART VILLAGES GAINING MOMENTUM**

RURAL ISSUES, RURAL PERSPECTIVES

- **FIRST BALKAN RURAL PARLIAMENT**
- **THINKING CAP**
- **IMPROVING RURAL BROADBAND NETWORKS**

FOCUS ON...

COMMUNICATIONS

European Network for Rural Development

The European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) is the hub that connects rural development stakeholders throughout the European Union (EU). The ENRD contributes to the effective implementation of Member States' Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) by generating and sharing knowledge, as well as through facilitating information exchange and cooperation across rural Europe.

Each Member State has established a National Rural Network (NRN) that brings together the organisations and administrations involved in rural development. At EU level, the ENRD supports the networking of these NRNs, national administrations and European organisations.

Find out more on the *ENRD website* (<https://enrd.ec.europa.eu>)

***Europe Direct is a service to help you find answers
to your questions about the European Union.***

**Freephone number (*):
00 800 6 7 8 9 10 11**

(* The information given is free, as are most calls
(though some operators, phone boxes or hotels may charge you).

Managing editor: Neda Skakelj, Head of Unit, EC Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development.

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Manuscript text finalised during December 2018. Original version is the English text.

More information on the European Union is available on the internet (<http://europa.eu>).

Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2018

ISSN 2443-731X (print)

ISSN 2443-7379 (web)

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Printed by Bietlot in Belgium

PRINTED ON ELEMENTAL CHLORINE-FREE BLEACHED PAPER (ECF)

You can also order one paper copy free-of-charge via the EU Bookshop website: <http://bookshop.europa.eu> or by sending a request to info@enrd.eu

Acknowledgements

Authors: Sandro Angiolini, Isane Aparicio, Fabio Cossu, Elena Di Federico, Gaya Ducceschi, Giuseppe Gargano, Maeve Howe, Laura Jalasjoki, Oliver Joy, Miodrag Matavulj, Ian McCafferty, Derek McGlynn, Veneta Paneva, Dragan Roganovic, Massimiliano Schiralli, Myles Stiffler, Sinikka Torssonen, Rogier van den Brink, Ina Van Hoye, Grazia Valentino, Roxana Vilcu.

Layout: Benoit Goossens, Tipik

Cover photo: © Walloon Network Support Unit

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EDITORIAL



Did you know that our network is ten years old? The European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) was created in 2008 by the European Commission. Plans are underway to mark this milestone, so keep reading until the end of this article to find out more!

Networking has evolved considerably over the past decade. A striking example is communications or how today's networkers choose to engage with their communities. Rural development networkers are embracing the latest digital technology and enhancing proven techniques to become more effective in their outreach activity.

In this edition of Rural Connections, our **Focus on... Communications** (pp. 27-38) uncovers the latest thinking and profiles some inspiring practices that support Rural Development policy implementation. We profile great examples of communications that include the use of new digital channels, on-farm knowledge exchange and marketing initiatives. The content has been inspired by our June 2018 workshop on Rural network communications.

The updated EU Bioeconomy Strategy is expected to accelerate the growth of the European bioeconomy and contribute to the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals. The ambition level is high: up to one million new jobs by 2030, including plenty of high-quality jobs for our rural communities. We cover the latest developments in our regular round-up of **News and Updates** (pp. 4-12), such as our thematic work on mainstreaming the bioeconomy, alongside our smart villages work, recent events and other network news.

In the **Rural Issues, Rural Perspectives** (pp. 14-26) section, we cover a diverse range of topics. An opinion piece touches on potential barriers to bioeconomy value chains in Southern European countries. Other topics covered in this edition range from initiatives to improve rural broadband, to the RuralGOOD project in Italy where a new generation of farmers are learning how multi-functional agriculture can result in greater profitability and better quality of life, to rural development in countries neighbouring the EU, to a World Bank economic report that demonstrates how the CAP benefits the rural economy and drives growth.

Earlier, I promised to tell you about how we will mark an important networking milestone. In April 2019, the ENRD will organise **networX** (p.5) – the largest ever gathering of the European rural networking community to be organised under the current programming period. The event will showcase how networks are inspiring rural Europe and share the latest networking techniques. Stay tuned for plenty more about networking from the ENRD, including in the next edition of the EU Rural Review.

As ever, if you have any comments or ideas about what we should feature in future editions of Rural Connections, please do get in touch.

Derek McGlynn
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NEWS & UPDATES

ENRD NEWS



Smart villages gaining momentum

What is happening at the ENRD level?

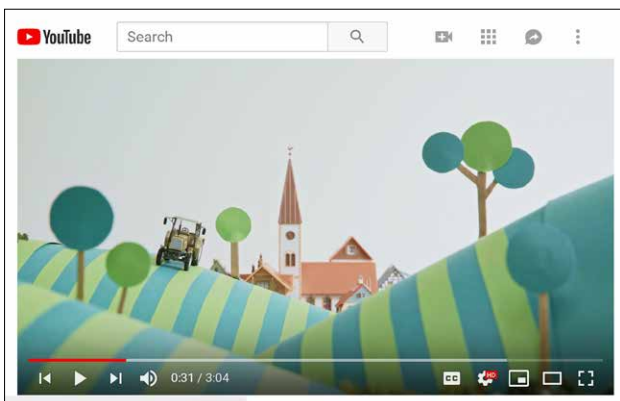
The ENRD Contact Point thematic work on smart villages has moved into a new phase. The focus is now on examining practical approaches to using the available policy tools that allow smart villages to emerge and progress.

The scoping work of the ENRD Thematic Group (TG) – carried out in the summer of 2018 – generated much interest and involvement from the network, ranging from rural stakeholders, to National Rural Networks (NRNs), to various EU Member State ministries and agencies.

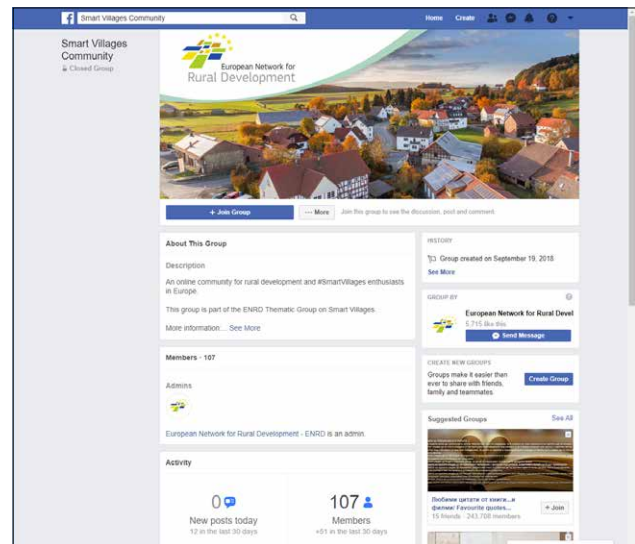
The main driver for smart villages is currently considered to be the digitisation of rural areas which the TG will continue to support through identification of effective national strategies and good practices.

The wide array of national policies and initiatives which may contribute to smart villages tackle a broader range of policy areas, such as health or education, highlighting the need for good governance and coordination for effective implementation.

Watch our smart villages video (available in 22 languages)



Join the smart villages Facebook community



The TG is looking to identify transferable examples of integrated policy initiatives that show how to best use and combine different instruments in order to promote smart villages.

The TG held meetings in October and December 2018 and another two will take place in the first half of 2019.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

For all the latest TG information:

https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/enrd-thematic-work/smart-and-competitive-rural-areas/smart-villages_en

Smart villages portal – discover smart projects, initiatives, approaches and networks:

https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/smart-and-competitive-rural-areas/smart-villages/smart-villages-portal_en

THE SMARTEST VILLAGE IN FINLAND

The Finnish Rural Network (Maaseutu.fi) is running a competition to identify Finland's smartest village. Over 30 contestants have entered the competition to become more vital, active and innovative.

The participating villages are being offered guidance, ideas, peer support, and networking opportunities over a year and a half. The winning village will be selected at the end of 2019.

www.maaseutu.fi/en/topical-greetings-from-countryside-and-around-the-world/32-villages-want-to-be-the-smartest-in-finland/

NEWS & UPDATES

Join us @ **networX**

Over 400 rural development enthusiasts will gather at the **networX** event in Brussels on 11-12 April 2019. Will you be one of them?

Under the theme of 'Inspiring Rural Europe', the event will tell the story of rural development networking. It will feature key learnings from the past ten years of rural networking and reflect on future networking needs and opportunities. Networking has evolved significantly as a Rural Development policy tool and it continues to find new ways of bringing people together. The networX event will have an interactive format incorporating space and time for inspiring conversations and the sharing of ideas, re-affirming the value of human connections in the digital world. The value of networking lies in its ability to make connections and deliver results that otherwise would not occur.

The ENRD is further promoting networking this year with the **Rural Inspiration Awards** competition. The awards will recognise rural development

initiatives – suggested by the National Rural Networks – that support a more competitive, sustainable and inclusive rural Europe.

The winning initiatives will be announced at networX. There are five categories: improving competitiveness; environment and climate action; rural revitalisation; social inclusion; and LEADER – plus a popular vote category – and all concern projects or actions funded under the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) in the 2014-2020 period.

Networking will also be the subject of the upcoming edition of the **EU Rural**

Review which will trace how it has grown to become a defining characteristic of Rural Development policy in Europe and consider what its role will be under the post-2020 Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

 FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

networX:
https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/enrd-rural-networking-conference_en
 Contact your NRN for more about the Rural Inspiration Awards:
https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networking/nrn-profiles_en

GOOD PRACTICES TIPS

The ENRD workshop of 8 November 2018 saw National Rural Networks explain how they approach the core network task of identifying, collecting and disseminating project examples and good practices.

https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/enrd-workshop-project-examples-and-good-practices-approaches-collection-and_en

ENRD Contact Point team changes

The Contact Point has welcomed three new colleagues, Laura Jalasjoki (left), Elena Di Federico (middle) and Carlos de La Paz (right) to its Brussels team.

Laura joins the knowledge development team as a Policy Analyst, Elena joins the knowledge sharing team as Senior Editor, and Carlos joins the exchange and cooperation team as a Policy Analyst.


 FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

For the full Contact Point team list visit: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/contact/enrd-contact-point_en

NEWS & UPDATES

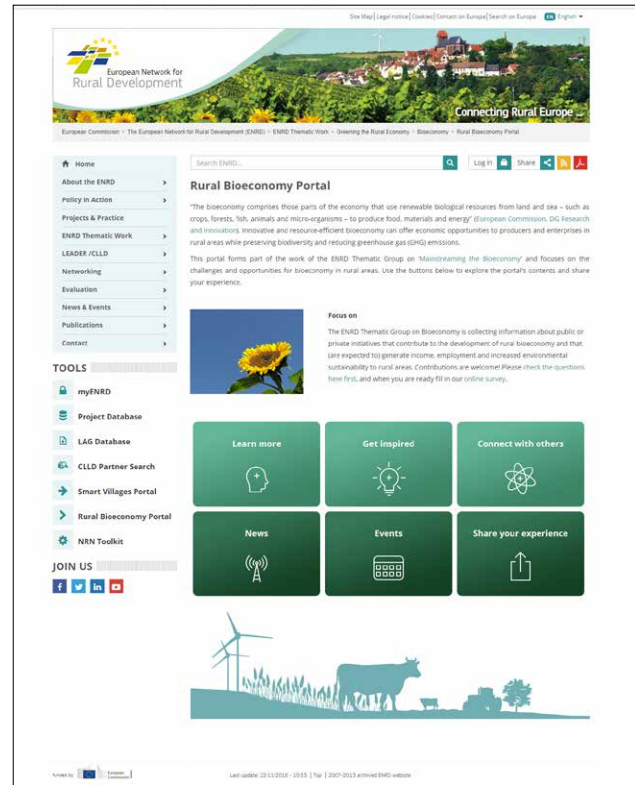
Mainstreaming the Bioeconomy

The ENRD has launched a new topic for its thematic work: 'Mainstreaming the Bioeconomy'. A Thematic Group (TG) is working between September 2018 and July 2019 to examine the role of the Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) in supporting the evolution and development of the bioeconomy, the actors involved and opportunities for rural areas.

The overall objective is to encourage the development of sustainable bioeconomy value chains in rural areas that can promote economic growth and employment whilst preserving ecosystems.

The newly revised EU Bioeconomy Strategy signals a desire to deliver more from the bioeconomy in terms of added economic value and prosperity, as well as outcomes that meet emerging social and environmental needs, such as low-carbon and renewable materials.

Elements of the ENRD thematic work will include TG meetings, analytical work, a pan-European Seminar, upcoming editions of the main ENRD publications and an online portal bringing together a rich collection of relevant policy documents, publications, projects, and initiatives. For regular updates on #bioeconomy follow the ENRD on Twitter and Facebook.


 FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Visit the 'Bioeconomy' page on the ENRD website: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/enrd-thematic-work/greening-rural-economy/bioeconomy_en
Browse through the resources in the Bioeconomy Portal: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/enrd-thematic-work/greening-rural-economy/bioeconomy/rural-bioeconomy-portal_en
Read the updated EU Bioeconomy Strategy: <https://ec.europa.eu/research/bioeconomy/index.cfm?pg=policy&lib=strategy>

European Rural Networks' Steering Group

Rural networking under the post-2020 Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) was the main discussion topic at the 10th meeting of the European Rural Networks' Steering Group (SG) of 22 October 2018 in Brussels (Belgium), alongside preparation of the 5th meeting of the Rural Networks' Assembly of 11 December 2018.

The European Commission updated SG members on the content and state-of-play of discussions about the new CAP legislative proposals and explained why

it sees a reinforced need and role for networking in the post-2020 CAP.

While the proposals envisage a high degree of continuity in networks' key objectives and tasks, the most significant changes include the set-up of a single CAP network at EU level, replacing the current ENRD and EIP networks. Similarly, national CAP networks dealing with agriculture and rural development will replace the current National Rural Networks (NRNs). This means that the scope of networking

at both EU and national levels will be extended from rural development to encompass in future both Pillars of the CAP, mirroring the scope of the new CAP Strategic Plans.

 FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Find out more about the Steering Group: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/about/european-rural-networks-governance/european-rural-networks-steering-group_en

NEWS & UPDATES

Key steps for CAP strategic planning

A recent ENRD Seminar (23 October 2018 – Brussels, Belgium) explored the practical implications of designing and drafting the post-2020 Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) Strategic Plans, including the main elements and steps in the process of preparing the plans.

The event brought together EU Member State representatives from Rural Development Programme (RDP) Managing Authorities, Paying Agencies, experts from both Pillars of the CAP, and the European Commission. It provided a space for exchange of experience and helped identify the support needs of those who are directly involved in the exercise in Member States.

Participants identified the elaboration of SWOT and needs analyses, fixing of targets for result indicators and design of well-targeted interventions to achieve the specific CAP objectives as some of the key elements of the future plans.

New opportunities arising from the combination of the two funding instruments of CAP – the European Agricultural

Guarantee Fund (EAGF) and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) – in a single strategic document were explored. Specific discussion topics included the new green architecture, competitiveness and resilience, generational renewal and social fabric of rural areas.

The necessary administrative capacity to manage the transition to the 2021-2027 programming period highlighted the need for further similar exchanges and guidance in the process of drafting the CAP Strategic Plans.

 FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Visit the event page on the ENRD website:
https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/enrd-seminar-key-steps-cap-strategic-planning_en
CAP legislative proposals:
https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/key-policies/common-agricultural-policy/future-cap_en

“Doing it the LEADER way”

Over 100 LEADER/CLLD practitioners explored how to best demonstrate the relevance and added value of the LEADER approach in varying thematic areas and beyond the local rural context at a recent ENRD Seminar (15-17 October 2018 – Rust, Austria).

The participants were immersed in a rich collection of inspiring projects and approaches. The event combined plenary sessions, field trips, a ‘marketplace’ of Austrian Local Action Groups (LAGs), and

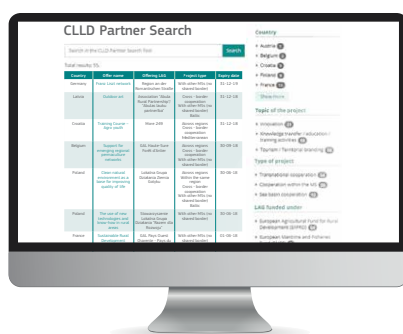
short EU LAG presentations. The examples emphasised the importance of “doing things the LEADER way” and presented strategies that have worked in addressing emerging both local challenges and opportunities, while also contributing to wider societal priorities such as social inclusion, depopulation in rural areas, developing renewable energy and biodiversity protection.

A broader discussion identified priority actions to boost LEADER’s role and

achievements in the 2014-2020 period that can translate into success factors for the future, post-2020 period.

 FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Visit the event page on the ENRD website: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/enrd-seminar-leader-acting-locally-changing-world_en



COOPERATION TIME

Have you joined the ENRD database of LAGs? Hundreds of LAG managers have already signed up and are launching cooperation offers.

Update your profile now and start cooperating!

- https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader-clld/lag-database_en
- https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader-clld/clld-partner-search_en

NEWS & UPDATES

UPDATE FROM THE EVALUATION HELPDESK

EUROPEAN
EVALUATION
HELPDESK
FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Preparing for impact assessment

In 2019, the second series of enhanced Annual Implementation Reports (AIRs) will be submitted by Managing Authorities (MAs) to the European Commission. The 2019 AIRs will build on the information provided in the 2017 AIRs through the assessment of impacts, thereby indicating the progress made towards the objectives of the Rural Development Programme (RDP) and the EU's strategy for a smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

WHAT ARE THE METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES?

The assessment and netting out of RDP impacts is a challenging task and raises several questions:

- How can changes observed in rural areas be attributed to the RDP's interventions and which evaluation approaches should be used for this purpose?
- Which data from existing sources (e.g. monitoring, EU, national and regional databases) should be used to inform the suggested evaluation approach?
- How should various data providers be coordinated?
- How can data quality be ensured and data gaps be bridged?

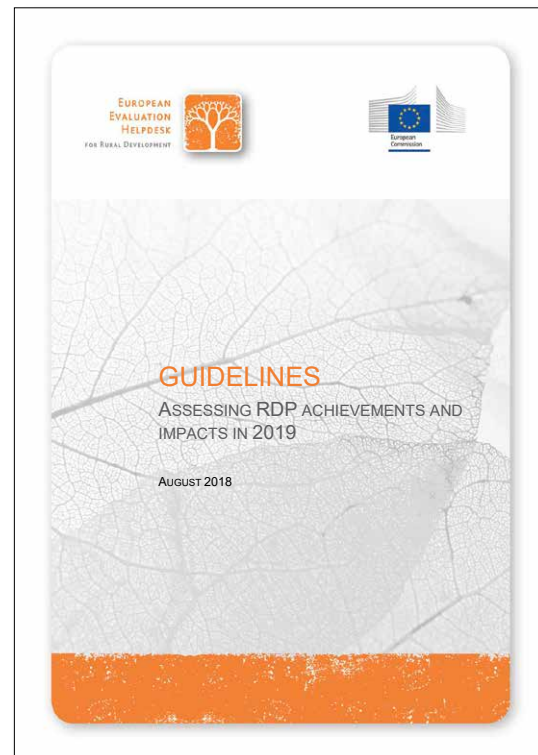
SUPPORTING MEMBER STATES IN THE ASSESSMENT OF RDP IMPACTS IN 2019

To support Member States in conducting these evaluation activities in 2019 and to overcome these challenges, the Evaluation Helpdesk has published the non-binding 'Guidelines: Assessing RDP achievements and impacts in 2019'.

The Guidelines show what needs to be assessed in 2019 and provide for each of the common CAP impact indicators a specific logic model, to help MAs and evaluators find the most suitable approach based on their data availability, resources and needs. These innovative logic models can guide the evaluator towards new approaches, better planning for data gathering, and methods that are less reliant on data availability (e.g. qualitative methods). Logic models can also help the MAs to better plan and predict the evaluation outcomes within the given context (data, evaluation budget and timeline).

The logic models provide a practical step-by-step guide for the design of each evaluation approach to enable a better understanding of:

- **Possibilities:** what are the available combinations of data, indicators and methods suitable to answer the evaluation questions.
- **Requirements:** what data, indicators, methods, and



approaches are required to assess net impacts and to answer the evaluation questions.

- **Consequences:** what implications do decisions at different stages have on the cost and effectiveness of the evaluation.

Furthermore, for each impact indicator an example of an optimal approach and additional approaches are described in detail. Fiches for answering common evaluation questions No. 22-30 have also been published to complement the Guidelines.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

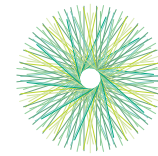
Guidelines: Assessment of RDP achievements and impacts in 2019:

https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/evaluation/publications/assessing-rdp-achievements-and-impacts-2019_en

Evaluation Helpdesk updated glossary of key terms:
https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/evaluation/publications/glossary-key-terms-related-evaluation-rural-development-programmes-2014-2020_en

NEWS & UPDATES

UPDATE FROM EIP-AGRI

eip-agri
AGRICULTURE & INNOVATION

Digitising agriculture and rural areas

While many farmers benefit from digital technologies, some EU Member States' and regions' digital strategies for the farming and rural sectors are lagging behind. The European Commission's 'Communication on the Future of Food and Farming' noted that the uptake of new technologies "remains below expectations and unevenly spread throughout the EU".

Looking ahead, the legislative proposals for the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) post 2020 indicate that CAP Strategic Plans should describe their intended contribution to the development of digital technologies in agriculture and rural areas and the use of these technologies to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the planned interventions.

The EIP-AGRI seminar on 'Multi-level strategies for digitising agriculture and rural areas' – 12-13 December 2018, Antwerp (Belgium) – built upon the substantial groundwork made to incentivise the digitisation of the farming sector and of rural areas in Europe, including through the EIP-AGRI network and the ENRD.

The objectives were: to raise awareness about the role and importance of strategic planning in order to foster and steer the digitisation of agriculture and rural areas; to inspire with examples of strategic planning and digitisation initiatives across Europe; to kick-start the process of developing digital strategies adapted to the local context and to local needs; and to showcase tools

and initiatives developed at EU level to accompany the digital transformation in the farming and rural economy sectors.

The seminar builds on EIP-AGRI's ongoing work (see box below) to prepare agriculture and rural areas for the digital transformation.



© EIP-AGRI Service Point

INSPIRING INNOVATION

Digital technologies that help farmers to provide safe, sustainable and quality food are not confined to the farm, they facilitate the exchange of knowledge.

In Finland, "agricultural advisors hold 45 000 meetings and travel 5.5 million km annually," according to Jussi Juhola from ProAgria, a Finnish advisory service. Looking to improve the efficiency of their service,

ProAgria launched a free, open-source digital platform.

The platform provides 24/7 advice, improved access to information and peer group benchmarking. Each user's information is accessible via a personalised dashboard. The technology allows online client meetings, chat services, automated advice, forecasts and alerts, and the latest knowledge and research is disseminated on the platform. It also

integrates farm management tools, such as for accounting, crop planning and herd management.

An EIP-AGRI workshop held in April 2018 in Jurmala (Latvia) – entitled 'Enabling farmers for the digital age: the role of AKIS' – brought advisors and rural networkers together to explore and strengthen the role of Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) where inspiring cases (such as ProAgria) were featured.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Agriinnovation magazine: <https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/en/publications/agriinnovation-magazine-issue-n%C2%B0-5-october-2018>

NEWS & UPDATES

EU NEWS

Updated EU Bioeconomy Strategy



© European Commission

On 16 November 2017, the European Commission organised a high-level event, involving nine Directorates General (DGs), to discuss how to strengthen the connection between the economy, society and the environment.

Expectation has been building since then. In October 2018, the Commission published its updated Bioeconomy Strategy and action plan to develop a sustainable and circular bioeconomy. Europe is setting course for a resource-efficient and sustainable economy. The goal is a more innovative

and low-emissions economy, reconciling demands for sustainable agriculture and fisheries, food security, and the sustainable use of renewable biological resources for industrial purposes, while ensuring biodiversity and environmental protection.

The update proposes three-tiered action to:

- Strengthen and scale up the bio-based sectors, unlock investments and markets;
- Deploy local bioeconomies rapidly across Europe;
- Protect ecosystems and understand the ecological boundaries of the bioeconomy.

Under the lead of the Commission's DG for Research and Innovation, the strategy was co-signed by the DGs for Agriculture and Rural Development, Environment, Maritime Affairs, and Industry and Entrepreneurship.

The updated bioeconomy strategy is expected to have beneficial effects on rural areas such as putting farmers, foresters and other rural economic actors at the forefront of new solutions to problems affecting society at large. Some €10 billion of funding is proposed to be set aside for food and natural resources, including the bioeconomy under Horizon Europe (2021-2027).

The ENRD Thematic Group on 'Mainstreaming the Bioeconomy' is providing insight into approaches that support the bioeconomy (see p.6). The EIP-AGRI network will organise a workshop on 'Opportunities for farm diversification in the circular bioeconomy' in Vilnius (Lithuania) on 6-7 February 2019.

"One key element of the strategy is to make innovative solutions and relevant research more widely available to final users: in other words, farmers, foresters, rural businesses and the rural population at large."

Phil Hogan,
European Commissioner
for Agriculture and Rural
Development,
Conference on 'Revised
EU Bioeconomy Strategy'
(22 October 2018)

 FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

EU Bioeconomy strategy:

<https://ec.europa.eu/research/bioeconomy/index.cfm?pg=policy&lib=strategy>

ENRD Bioeconomy portal:

https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/enrd-thematic-work/greening-rural-economy/bioeconomy_en

EIP-AGRI event:

<http://tporganics.eu/eip-agri-workshop-opportunities-for-farm-diversification-in-the-circular-bioeconomy/>

NEWS & UPDATES

Unlocking the agricultural investment gap

The Investment Plan for Europe is working to increase investment levels and put Europe on the path of economic recovery. The plan's European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) is already unlocking funding for exciting new agricultural projects around Europe.

A recent example comes from Ireland where in August 2018 an agri-technology company secured €118 million in long-term funding to enable its research, development and growth plans. This major re-financing deal is made possible by a pioneering investment of €40 million from the European Investment Bank (EIB). The EIB's intervention has helped unlock investment from commercial finance partners in the private sector.

The investment is the largest ever support for agri-business in Ireland by the EIB. It is also the first support for the agri-business sector in the country under the Investment Plan for Europe. The financing will enable a purpose-built innovation centre and research into optimised animal nutrition, food innovation, health and sustainability. It demonstrates just how the EFSI bridges the funding gap for companies who have a vision for the future and who need investment in research and innovation to maintain a competitive edge.

The EFSI works in combination with other EU financing tools to support innovation in rural areas. EFSI projects can benefit from



© Unsplash

support under the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), for example. The blending of the EFSI with other EU financing tools is applicable to classic investment projects such as the acquisition of physical assets, but also to more complex projects such as the realisation of new business concepts or innovative joint ventures.

Investment platforms, vehicles which pool smaller projects by location or sector, can be utilised to make it easier for individual agriculture projects to unlock financing. For example, the EFSI could lend its backing to an investment platform designed to support precision farming which would, in turn, allow individual farmers to take out loans to invest in the IT systems needed.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

EFSI in the agriculture sector:

https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/jobs-growth-and-investment/investment-plan-europe-juncker-plan/investment-plan-results/efsi-agriculture-sector_en

EFSI example from Ireland:

https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/news/investing-irish-agricultural-technology_en

Financial Instruments resources

The advisory platform fi-compass has put together a collection of resources on Financial Instruments under the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), including the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) in a searchable library.

The resources include publications, manuals, videos and case studies from various EU countries and regions and provide an overview of practical experiences in the programming and implementation of Financial Instruments for agriculture and rural development.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

fi-compass library:

www.fi-compass.eu/resources

fi-compass events:

www.fi-compass.eu/events

NEWS & UPDATES

EU projects

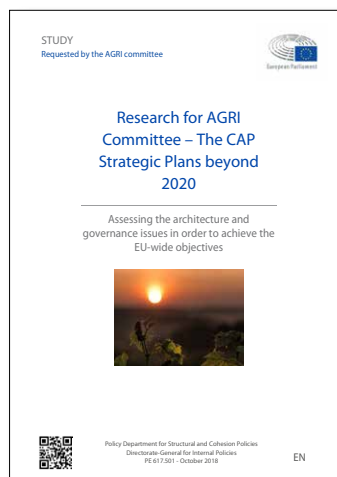
A selection of new resources related to rural businesses, services and public goods from agriculture and forestry made available by EU-funded projects:

- A set of **good practice examples of rural entrepreneurship** in areas such as energy, environment, eco-industries, ICT and social innovation identified by the Rural SMEs project (funded under Interreg Europe). www.interregeurope.eu/ruralsmes/good-practices/
- A collection of **good practice examples and pilot actions** on sustainable solutions to **rural mobility and service delivery** identified and developed by the MAMBA project (funded under the EU's Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme). www.mambaproject.eu/products/
- A **knowledge platform** bringing together smart and transferable solutions for the sustainable production of **public goods** from EU agriculture and forestry developed by the Horizon 2020 project PROVIDE. <http://provideknowledgeplatform.eu>



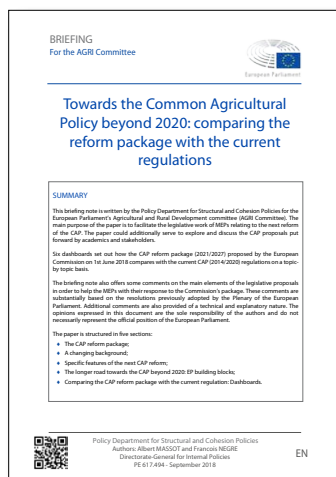
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EU guides and publications



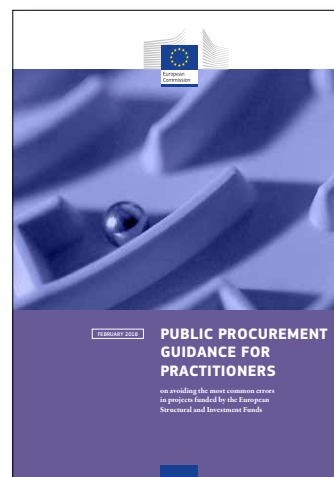
The study assesses the design of the post-2020 Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) Strategic Plans as foreseen in the European Commission's legislative proposal of June 2018.

ISBN 978-92-846-3971-7



The briefing draws comparisons between the reform package of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in the 2021–2027 period and the current regulations.

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HAPPY NEW YEAR 2019

FROM THE ENRD CONTACT POINT TEAM



RURAL ISSUES, RURAL PERSPECTIVES

Improving rural broadband networks

Isane Aparicio

To boost connectivity in rural areas, collaboration between the Broadband Competence Offices (BCO) Network and rural networkers needs to grow.



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The first two years of the BCO Network have been devoted to the consolidation and upskilling of the national and regional BCOs. One of the main findings has been the low number of BCOs (circa 20%) that are aware of the work of the ENRD.

A recent workshop on rural connectivity, organised by the BCO Network,⁽¹⁾ showed that more than 80% of the BCOs have neither been in touch with their country's National Rural Network (NRN), nor with a Local Action Group (LAG). While the BCO's main objective is to provide universal connectivity, LEADER groups and EIP-AGRI Operational Groups can be essential partners in ensuring that connectivity brings real benefits to rural residents.

The three pillars of the rural digital divide – namely deficient broadband connectivity, lack of digital skills and uptake of digital services – form a significant challenge to the attainment of EU connectivity objectives in rural areas. For policy initiatives to translate into effective and successful projects enhancing rural connectivity, more technical guidance and access to flexible financial tools are required.

There are already some great examples of cooperation between rural networkers and BCOs (see box). In such cases, the BCO typically guides project promoters and policy-makers from the inception of the project, providing guidance to accelerate the roll-out of broadband in their country or region.

At the European level, decision-makers from different policy areas have worked together to prepare the Action Plan for broadband deployment in rural areas. Some features of the Plan to promote connectivity in the EU's rural and remote areas include:

- The BCO Network is to provide a single point of guidance to public administrations, telecom operators, and all other public and private stakeholders interested in rolling out broadband infrastructure and services.
- The European Commission is to introduce 'rural proofing' to help prioritise rural broadband in the re-programming of any structural and investment funds with the aim of avoiding a further increase in the digital gap.

A rural network of co-working spaces

The COWOCAT-Rural project in Catalonia (Spain) has brought village co-working spaces in 10 LEADER areas together to help stem the brain drain from rural areas by establishing a network to attract professionals and improve the digital skills of local entrepreneurs.

One way to re-invigorate rural areas battling depopulation is to harness Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and boost skills by using co-working spaces. Following a pilot initiative, the COWOCAT-Rural project scaled up the idea. It went on to develop a network of co-working spaces in the region.

The regional Catalan BCO assists local actors by providing coaching, helping the search for financing opportunities and supporting awareness-raising efforts. They also provide information about the availability of broadband networks in the territory, including real capacities of bandwidth.

For more information about COWOCAT, see:

- EAFRD Projects Brochure: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/publications/eafrd-projects-brochure-digital-and-social-innovation-rural-services_en
- ENRD Projects Database: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/projects-practice_en

(1) BCOs provide legal, technical and financial guidance to project promoters and policy-makers to support stakeholders in their country or region in accelerating broadband roll-out. For further information, please check www.bconetwork.eu



© BCO Network

- The Commission will design a rural broadband project framework, a hands-on guide of DOs and DON'Ts of rural broadband projects, aiming to help local communities implement broadband projects in rural areas.

During the 2014-2020 period, around €20bn from the five EU Structural and Investment Funds are devoted to ICT, broadband and e-governance, out of which circa €6 bn is financing high-speed broadband roll out in both rural and urban areas.

Under the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), several Measures can be used for the deployment of broadband projects, in particular Measure 7 (Basic Services – M7.3), but also LEADER (M19) can be used as a funding tool to bring local users together in order to create a critical mass of local demand, support technical studies and business plans, as well as small-scale investments.

Some other EAFRD Measures, such as Measure 6 (Farm and business development – M6.2 or M6.4) or Measure 16 (Cooperation – M16.2) could be further leveraged for the promotion of innovation, as well as for the promotion of digital services by supporting a variety of stakeholders at the different stages of a project.

In addition to funding via grants, the European Investment Bank and other financial bodies can help local authorities and rural communities access the finance required for their projects through Financial Instruments which help lever in additional funds. The new Connecting Europe Broadband Fund (CEBF) aims to pool around €500m that should help mobilise at least €1 bn in investment over five years.

For rural and remote areas with no connectivity, a combination of different funding sources could enable a digitisation programme.

The support of the relevant BCO from the planning stage (especially regarding the implications of state-aid regulations and guidance on the most adequate business model) can help ease the process and maximise the impact of the initiative. The BCO is also well-positioned to advise on the existing funding opportunities which may be allocated through the different project phases, e.g. the infrastructure covered by the EU's regional development (ERDF), rural development (EAFRD), or national funds and the animation and preparatory work funded through LEADER. The contribution of private funds can also be channelled through the CEBF.

i FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

The Broadband Competence Office is a single contact point to guide municipalities, citizens, broadband project promoters investors, and enterprises through the whole cycle of a project promoting broadband. Should you need support, contact the BCO in your country or region, or send your request to info@broadbandeurope.eu

Funding opportunities information:
<https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/european-funding-broadband>

RURAL ISSUES, RURAL PERSPECTIVES

First Balkan Rural Parliament

Dragan Roganovic and Miodrag Matavulj

Rural stakeholders in the Western Balkans have a clear perspective of becoming members of the European Union and thus contribute to the socio-economic development and diversity of Europe and its rural areas.



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Rural development is an extremely important issue for all Western Balkan countries – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia – are all characterised by a significant number of people living in rural areas, the size of their rural territories and the important role which agriculture plays in the overall economy.

Rural stakeholders in the region recognise the importance of local mobilisation and active participation of all rural actors in community initiatives, but they are also aware that building a strong partnership between rural stakeholders and governments is vital for effective rural development. Hence, it is a prerequisite that the two sides work closely together; that governments involve rural stakeholders in creating and implementing policy; and that rural stakeholders are empowered in a way to become an equal partner to governments and to take initiatives which benefit rural communities.

In that spirit and based on the vast experience of national Rural Parliaments across Europe, the first Balkan Rural Parliament was organised by the Rural Development Network of Serbia on 26–28 June 2018 in Vrnjačka Banja (Serbia). Over 60 participants attended, contributed to, and adopted its Declaration. Participants representing various civil society organisations and networks, representatives of local and central authorities, representatives of the European Commission, young people, the donor community, and media representatives took part.

During the event, the National Rural Development Networks from all Western Balkan countries and Turkey, along with civil society organisations, highlighted the importance of rural development in their countries and the activities of civil society in support of rural communities and improvement of the environment for a more dynamic rural sector. International networks for rural development in the context of sectoral and inter-sectoral cooperation were also highlighted. During

the field visits, the participants saw first-hand examples of rural economic activities. They visited organisations of producers, individual farms (producers of cheese and kaymak, producers of honey and other beekeeping products, fruit producers), organic households, distilleries and touristic households, a museum of wine-making and a family winery.

The major themes discussed comprised: youth and women's role in rural development; short supply chains and role of the networks under the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance for Rural Development (IPARD); social entrepreneurship and diversification of economic activities in rural communities; use of LEADER/CLLD for faster development of rural communities in the Balkans; and culture and heritage as an opportunity for rural development. The themes were reflected in the Declaration of the first Balkan Rural Parliament which addressed a wide range of topics:

- A recognition that the Western Balkan countries and Turkey have a clear perspective of becoming equal members of the EU, and thus contribute to the socio-economic development of Europe and its rural areas.
- A call on European Funds supporting the process of EU integration of Balkan accession countries to pay close attention to the specific qualities of rural areas, the factors that affect the development process, as well as regional diversity.
- The regional cooperation between existing rural development networks within the scope of the Balkan Rural Development Network represents a quality basis for a participatory approach, as well as for the advocacy of the best interests of rural communities.
- Governments and the civil society should recognise and meet the needs of rural youth and women and enable them to participate actively in the decision-making processes and rural initiatives.
- European and government institutions across all levels should, within the scope of the pre-accession



- and national programmes and the available funds, provide stronger support for education, employment and entrepreneurship of the young and women in rural areas.
- The government and EU institutions should work on development of support measures for the collective short supply chain, within the scope of national measures and the IPARD programme.
 - The Balkan Rural Parliament recognises the needs to improve when it comes to fighting poverty and social exclusion in the Balkans and Turkey.
 - The Balkan Rural Parliament strongly advocates a territorial, integrated and partnership-based approach to rural development. Institutions and governments within the Western Balkans and Turkey should accelerate the establishment of a stimulating environment for the implementation of LEADER/CLLD through the expansion of funding, and adapt their rules and procedures to the needs of rural communities, as well as to ensure a truly integrated approach to local development and the use of multiple funds.
 - The culture and heritage of rural areas is of great significance to the Western Balkans and Turkey in a sense of preservation of the spirit of rural communities, but also because of the growing touristic sector in the region based on culture, heritage, rural tourism, local products and local knowledge through which it will be possible to improve the image of the region.

The Declaration is addressed to the governments and inter-governmental institutions of the Western Balkan countries, as well as to all stakeholders who can contribute to the well-being of rural communities in the region. It is also a contribution to the growing family of rural parliaments and to the preparation of the fourth European Rural Parliament to be held in Candás (Spain) in 2019.

The first Balkan Rural parliament was supported under the project ALTER – Active Local Territories for Economic development of Rural Areas – funded by the EU.

i FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

ALTER: www.balkan-noborder.com
 Agro PLANETA, Magazine for Agriculture and Rural Development: <http://cerd.ba/agro-planeta/>

RURAL ISSUES, RURAL PERSPECTIVES

Bioeconomy: reality, expectations, and barriers to development

Sandro Angiolini

The bioeconomy is a fast-developing sector and provides new opportunities for the agricultural sector and rural areas.



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BIOECONOMY IN THE EU

The bioeconomy is a fast-developing sector in Europe, both in terms of policy attention – the EU just published its updated Bioeconomy Strategy⁽¹⁾ and several EU Member States are establishing national strategies and initiatives on the ground. Pilot projects, such as the setting up of new plants, testing new production and processing methods and initiatives to raise awareness and to enhance the competitiveness of promising value chains, have been supported through several programmes (e.g. EAFRD, ERDF, Horizon 2020 and LIFE).

The bioeconomy provides opportunities to the agricultural sector and rural areas around the production of food, feed, bioenergy and new bio-based products. The use of agricultural waste, alternative crops and forestry residues for bioenergy is probably one of the better-known features of the bioeconomy. However, the sector has potential to create added value for rural areas beyond biomass production. Its development is expected to diversify economic activities – providing new sources of income and employment for rural areas – and to improve the environmental sustainability of production systems.

This article focuses on the bioeconomy development in Southern European countries and, above all, on some perceived barriers for biomass producers. The situation in these countries tends to be less well-known given that some Northern EU Member States' bioeconomy sectors are further advanced. The Southern countries host, nevertheless, a great deal of emerging bioeconomy initiatives with much potential for their rural areas.

BIOECONOMY IN SOUTHERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

Much of the bioeconomy development in Southern Europe has been centred on bioenergy in its various forms (e.g. biogas for producing heat and power, biofuels like biodiesel and biomethane). The development has been substantially driven by both fiscal incentives at the national level subsidising renewable sources of energy and by Rural Development Programme (RDP) funds (mainly Measures for investing in physical assets and Cooperation).

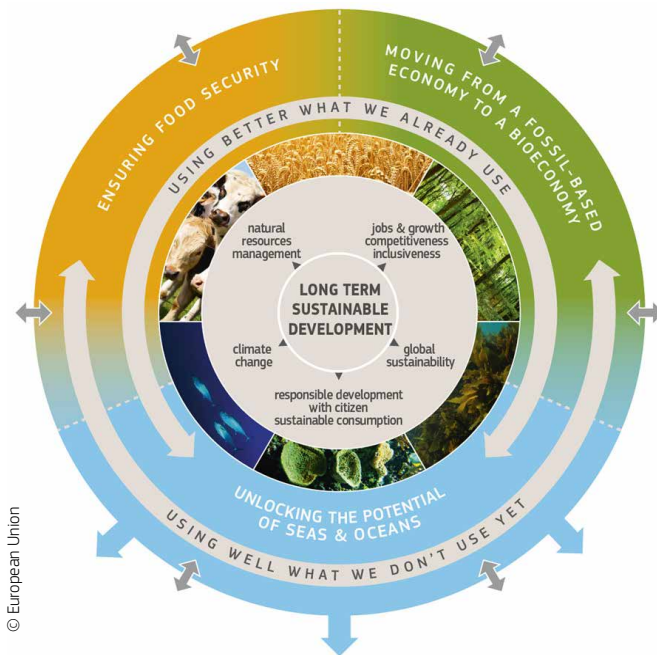
Italy and Spain are the countries where the bioeconomy is more developed, both in terms of strategies, active clusters/networks, and number of projects. For example, in Italy there are already some 2000 plants producing biogas (typically between 300 and 800 Kw) for a total power capacity of approximately 20 GWh. In Italy one can also find a dozen biorefineries mainly focused on the production of bioplastics, and several R&D centres and demonstration plants. Spain is very active in pilot projects, with a higher attention to work on microalgae, compared to other southern countries.

Portugal appears to be quickly entering the bioeconomy, while Greece is advancing more slowly, yet bioeconomy clusters and networks are already active in both countries.

BARRIERS TO FARMERS AND RURAL SMEs

There remain barriers that currently limit the attainment of the benefits of diversification and sustainability that bioeconomy value chains could deliver in Southern Europe.

(1) https://ec.europa.eu/research/bioeconomy/pdf/ec_bioeconomy_strategy_2018.pdf#view=fit&pagemode=none



These barriers vary by region and by the actors getting involved. For example, farmers may be reluctant to start dealing with bio-based products due to lack of knowledge and in order to avoid risk. Ageing farmers may be more innovation-sceptic (just 6% of EU farms are run by farmers under the age of 35). Evidence of positive results is needed to get more farmers to engage.

For those farmers who do explore bioeconomy opportunities, reaching a profitable scale and finding markets can be challenging, depending on the type of production. Different cooperative models between farmers and contractual arrangements between farmers, processors and buyers of bio-based products can help overcome these difficulties. National and regional bioeconomy strategies need to offer a clear vision and plan for the integration of primary producers into new bioeconomy value chains.

Since small farms and rural SMEs with low investment capacity represent the bulk of Southern EU countries' would-be bioeconomy entrepreneurs, appropriate funding may be needed. Action plans to deploy bioeconomy strategies need to comprise the synergetic use of existing support instruments offered by the RDPs, as well as other European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIFs).

Knowledge transfer, advisory services and skills upgrading are needed to help farmers adapt their agronomic practices (i.e. by cultivating new crops, combining the cultivation of main and intermediary crops or using the latest technology to deliver sustainable optimisation of the volume of biomass produced). Acquisition of new business skills can enable primary producers to optimise bioeconomy production processes into their core business model of traditional farming systems. They may also need support in terms of accessing relevant support schemes.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

The EU has a clear vision of the future of the bioeconomy, built on circular economy principles, such as: food first; sustainable crop yields; full use of the cascading approach in a resource-efficient system of production; diversity of practices according to distinct crops and contexts⁽²⁾. A transition period is needed before a well-structured bioeconomy sector matures and the characteristics of such a transition must still be shaped by key stakeholders, such as policy-makers, industries and farmers. The EU and national bioeconomy strategies should be key drivers in this process. The shared ambition is that by 2030, the bioeconomy sector will be driving the European economy forward.

To properly manage this transition, a series of actions are needed at all levels: from the improved awareness of stakeholders, to a more active management of the supply and demand for bioeconomy products. The EU and its Member States can accelerate the market pull, using various regulatory instruments such as public procurement rules, standardisation and appropriate labelling of bio-based products. They can help stimulate farmer involvement by improving access to finance through grants, Financial Instruments or a combination of the two, including within the future Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) Strategic Plans. In addition to addressing the barriers referred to above, the results of research and innovation projects, heavily invested in by the EU, need to be made accessible for farmers and other actors in the value chain.

The ENRD has set up a Thematic Group (TG) on 'Mainstreaming the Bioeconomy' to discuss approaches that optimise the benefits of the bioeconomy in rural areas. The TG, which began its work in September 2018 and will run until June 2019, will identify ways to use the RDPs and other instruments to support the development of sustainable bioeconomy value chains in rural areas.

(2) For more about the circular economy concept, see 'Sustainable Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries in the Bioeconomy – A Challenge for Europe', European Commission, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, 2015: <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/7869030d-6d05-11e5-9317-01aa75ed71a1>

RURAL ISSUES, RURAL PERSPECTIVES

Thinking CAP

Rogier van den Brink

Agriculture is proving to be a driver of inclusive growth in the EU.



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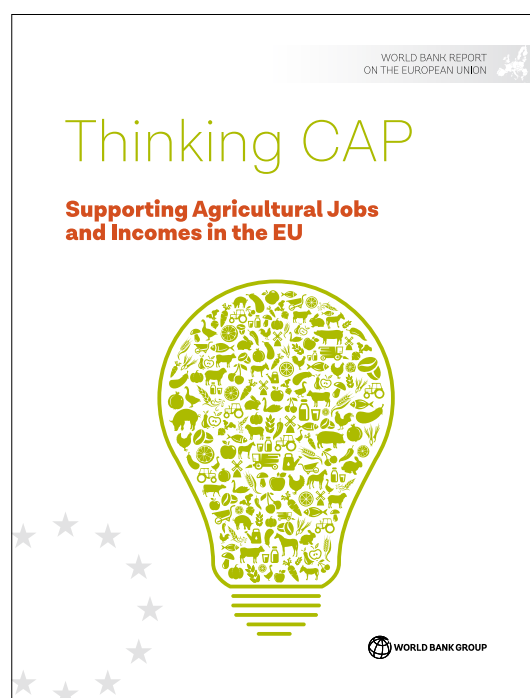
From the tulip farmer of the Netherlands who exports flowers to the capitals of the world to the Romanian widow who sells vegetables to her neighbours at a friendly price, the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) casts its net far and wide. The CAP's annual budget of roughly €50 billion a year finances over 40 million transactions every year, benefiting about 7 million farmers and making up about 46% of farm income in the EU.

But why bother about agriculture if its share in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) becomes minimal over time and it continues to shed labour? Are the poor not better-off in the fast-growing cities? Does agriculture not constrain the opportunities for growth and, consequently, the reduction of poverty?

It depends, argues a recent World Bank report on the European Union. Internationally, the key role agriculture plays in the structural transformation from farm to factory is well-established. While agriculture is typically not a sector which drives overall economic growth, the type of growth it generates is often inclusive: it reduces poverty better than growth originating in the other sectors. In about half of the EU Member States, agricultural areas are no longer synonymous with poverty.

These countries – a mix of both older and newer Member States – created the basic conditions which make agriculture profitable by building roads to bring products to market, securing property rights so owners can make long-term investments in their land, organising adequate advisory services to ensure that modern, efficient farming techniques are used, and providing access to health and education in rural areas so the farmers and their children, had the wherewithal to be successful in farming or in finding work outside of agriculture. In addition, farmers themselves organised to strengthen their bargaining power, improve their access to credit, acquire better information about new markets and technologies, and ensure that the government support was effective.

When these conditions are met, the CAP decoupled payments and support for rural investments are



associated with the reduction of poverty in agricultural areas and the maintenance of productive jobs for the families who chose to remain engaged in agriculture. Today, profitable and productive farming is a catalyst in many rural communities for driving people on to better jobs, higher wages and improved quality of life. Across the EU, but in particular in the newer Member States, the gap between agricultural incomes and those of other sectors is narrowing.

However, not all is good news. In the other half of Member States, agriculture continues to be associated with poverty. The report characterises these countries as incomplete transformers. In these Member States, the CAP has its work cut out, while governments need to do more to create the basic conditions which make agriculture profitable. This means aligning other programmes, both national and European, to help create these conditions. Because if the sector's overall profitability is lacking, CAP subsidies risk being wasted on unsustainable 'boutique' projects. In addition, the

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CAP coupled subsidies show little or no association with the positive trends on productivity and poverty found by the report.

For the successful transformers in the newer Member States, it seems that most of the basic conditions for agriculture are in place and agriculture can be a sector which provides reasonably attractive jobs. The decoupled Pillar I payments are important for smooth incomes and increased on-farm investment by otherwise risk-averse farmers. In the absence of these CAP payments, this aversion to risk could lead farmers to underinvest in their farm.

For the successful transformers in the older Member States, the rationale for the decoupled payments becomes weaker as incomes and land prices rise. The Pillar II support can provide important investments, both of a private and a collective nature.

Finally, during the field visits made in the context of the report, while fully acknowledging the necessity for controls and audits, farmers often complained about the amount and the type of red tape involved. This was because many of the conditions which farmers were required to meet were focused on compliance with processes and the *ex-ante* assessments of farm and project plans, not the achievement of *ex-post* results. As efficient farmers need to be able to continuously adjust their farming – including the crop mix – to changes in the weather and the market, farmers would rather be held accountable for the ultimate result, rather than whether or not their plans and proposals were done in exactly the way the bureaucracy wanted them to be done. For

instance, even very experienced and educated farmers often had to pay for consultants approved by the bureaucracy to draw up the project proposals. Given the rapid advances in data collection, remote sensing and digital agriculture, it is becoming more and more possible to respond positively to farmers' requests for more flexibility in return for more accountability with respect to results.

In conclusion, the CAP can be a powerful and far-reaching instrument for reducing poverty and boosting incomes, if it is part of a process of successful structural transformation. In this way, Europe's experience is consistent with international experience. At the same time, the EU and its main instrument for agricultural development – the CAP – is providing valuable insights into the most effective use of agricultural subsidies for the rest of the world.

i FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

'Thinking CAP' report:
<http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/369851513586667729/Thinking-CAP-World-Bank-Report-on-the-EU.pdf>

RURAL ISSUES, RURAL PERSPECTIVES

Targeting young multi-functional farmers

Grazia Valentino, Massimiliano Schiralli and Giuseppe Gargano

RuralGOOD, an interactive new Italian National Rural Network (NRN) project, has brought some 500 students from the agrarian technical institutes of the Puglia region closer to the world of agriculture.



TARGETING THE NEXT GENERATION

Rural4Learning is a project of the Italian National Rural Network (NRN) that is creating a closer link between agriculture and society through a series of initiatives targeting school students. It aims to foster the knowledge of rural development policies and to orient young people towards the agricultural professions.



One of these initiatives is the RuralGOOD project in Puglia, which was developed by the region as part of its Rural Development Programme (RDP) communications plan, financed under Technical Assistance (Measure 20), and implemented with the support of the Italian research organisation dedicated to agri-food supply chains (CREA-PB).



The project, realised in the first half of 2018, involved about 500 students from 12 agrarian technical institutes. The 17-year-old high-school students were given a compelling introduction to multi-functional agriculture which included real-life examples of how it can result in greater profitability and better quality of life for the next generation of farmers.

Throughout the project, a simple, direct, democratic communicative model was adopted. It was based on continuous interaction and participation of students to stimulate dialogue and discussion, including criticism of the potential of various agricultural activities.

The theme of multi-functionality has been chosen as it is a key element of the RDP strategy, supported through a set of Measures aimed at encouraging the development of non-agricultural activities and other interventions in the environmental field, such as biodiversity, integrated production and organic farming. In addition, it is seen as a topic that can stimulate young people to imagine and interpret agricultural activity more widely and ultimately

What is multi-functionality?

Multi-functionality is about a farming sector that serves rural communities, reflecting their rich tradition and diversity, and whose role is not only to produce food but also to guarantee the viability of the countryside as a place to live and work, and as an environment in itself.

Source: www.multifarmeuproject.eu

arouse interest in what could become their main working activity in the future, beyond food production.

A PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

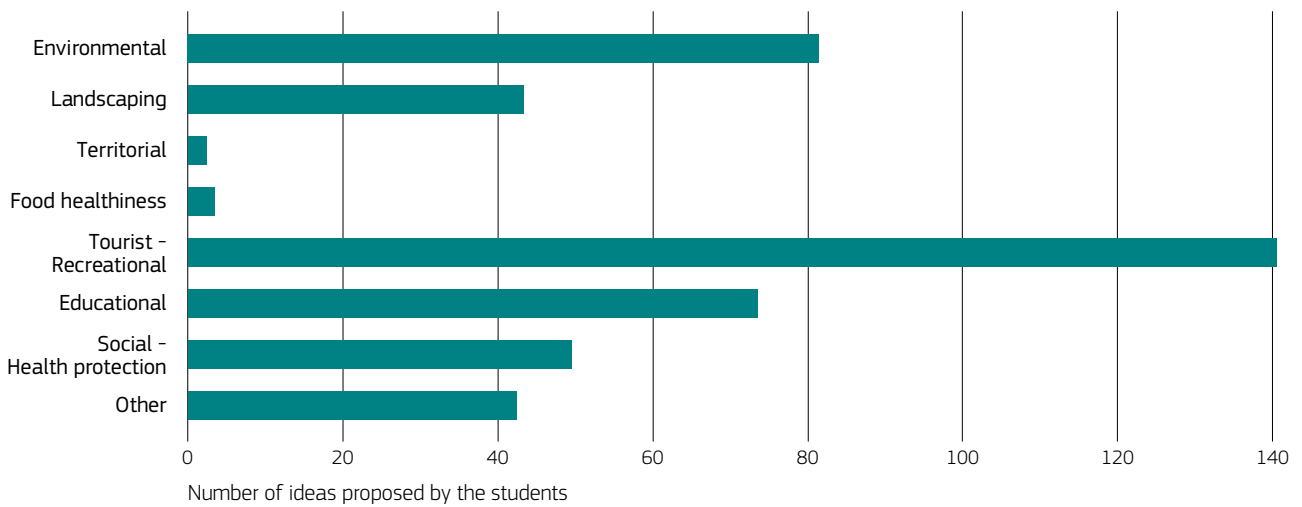
The RuralGOOD project was articulated in two phases. The first one – in the classroom – was dedicated to the presentation of the themes of the initiative and to the delivery of an interactive workshop with the students. The second phase was carried out at one of eight farms identified as being among the most interesting in terms of functions and activities undertaken.

The classroom-based activities made it possible to present the main concepts related to the implementation of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and of multi-functionality. The pedagogical interventions were complemented with a series of short films made in the former editions of the project. Here, some farmers described their experience of diversifying economic activity, adopting environmentally sustainable production methods, increasing links with the territory, creating networks between enterprises and institutions and the whole territory.

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Figure 1.

Functions of agriculture besides food production



The presentation concerning the concept of multi-functionality provided insight into the plurality of roles farmers can have. The functions highlighted included guaranteeing food safety, environmental protection, landscaping and hydrogeological preservation, as well as the social, recreational and didactic aspects of farms.

STUDY LABS AND FARM VISITS

Interactivity and dialogue with students was sought especially within the 'didactic laboratories' that were used to interpret the possible form and function that agriculture could play in the

collective imagination. Each working group, consisting of about 15-20 students, had to imagine the activities they wanted to undertake on their farm alongside 'traditional' ones.

The lab exercise helped to bring out the students' knowledge, needs, ideas and insights. Conceptual maps and lively brainstorming discussions among students encouraged understanding and evaluation of the significance, implications and effects of individual proposals.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of student proposals that emerged during the lab sessions, grouped into eight types of agricultural



function: environmental; landscaping; territorial; food healthiness; tourist-recreational; educational; social-health protection; other.

The most popular multi-functional activity among the students was linked to the tourist-recreational functions (e.g. bed and breakfast, agri-camping, wellness, tastings of local products, sports and music activities), followed by the environmental function (e.g. production of renewable energies and organic farming) and the educational function (e.g. educational farms, agri-nurseries). Opportunities to invest in social relations and thus to enhance business activity were highly sought after (e.g. meetings and collaborations with schools, non-profit organisations, consumers, cooperation with companies and institutions, social networks).

To give substance to the ideas that emerged during the classroom lessons, the students subsequently visited eight farms whose realities were particularly relevant. It allowed the young people to meet and exchange with farmers who have adopted a multi-functional approach and diversified their income streams. The farmers in question have, in addition to the production and

processing of raw materials, diversified into activities such as direct and online sales, educational and cultural activities, catering, leisure services, as well as bioenergy production. At the end of the project, the participating students made some short video interviews to give their view on multi-functionality.

The evaluation of the impacts on students of the entire initiative will be assessed on the basis of the answers given during the teaching workshops. The number and, above all, the depth of the individual 'messages' left by the young students during the laboratories, although expressing some fears, clearly show their desire to get involved as part of a new generation of multi-functional farmers.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Italian NRN: www.rural4learning.it

CREA: www.crea.gov.it

Puglia region RDP: <http://psr.regione.puglia.it/>

RURAL ISSUES, RURAL PERSPECTIVES

Georgia embraces rural development

Gaya Ducceschi

The rural development community is getting stronger and looking for cooperation opportunities.



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Rural development is playing an increasingly important role in Georgia. During my visit to Georgia in August 2018 – to Batumi in the Ajara region and the capital Tbilisi – I had the chance to witness first-hand the rate at which the rural development community is organising itself.

I participated on behalf of the ENRD Contact Point (CP) in a meeting of the Georgian Rural Development Network (GRDN). The GRDN was established with the support of the EU's European Neighbourhood

Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development (ENPARD) – see box. The GRDN meeting which involved rural actors such as Local Action Groups (LAGs) and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) active in the country – such as Caritas Int, CARE, USAID – focused on networking and generational renewal.

The Georgian Ministry of Agriculture representatives at the event see the National Rural Network (NRN) model as being the most effective Rural Development policy tool in the EU. The Georgian equivalent, the

GRDN, is expected to act as a platform for dialogue and cooperation for all key rural stakeholders to ensure wider stakeholder involvement in the Georgian Rural Development strategy implementation. To benefit from lessons learnt by others, the GDRN has been in touch with the ENRD CP and all NRNs in the EU.

GALAG, AMAGI AND AGRONAVTI

Beyond the NRN, there are EU-supported LAGs in eight municipalities in Georgia. They already have an association of LAGs called 'GALAG'. The LAGs and their GALAG were in the process of being officially recognised as legal entities while I was in Georgia. They are also looking to the future: representatives of the European

LEADER Association for Rural Development (ELARD) had been to Georgia to meet with GALAG members.

The 'Amagi' is an interesting bottom-up example of rural development in Georgia. There are 46 *Amagi* involving over 700 citizens from over 300 villages. *Amagi* members work on a voluntary basis and help the local government in setting the priorities to define the local development agenda.

Technology is also being embraced. The Georgian farmers' organisation (GFA) have developed 'Agronavti', an application that promotes a fairer supply chain by allowing farmers to sell directly to a wide network of hospitality business.



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FRIENDLY NEIGHBOURS

The EU supports rural development in Georgia through its European Neighbourhood Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development (ENPARD). Aiming to reduce rural poverty, ENPARD has been implemented since 2013, with a total budget of € 179.5 million.

The first phase of ENPARD focused on developing national agriculture potential, while the second and third phases focus on creating economic opportunities for the rural population that go beyond agricultural activities. It is seeking to re-invigorate the agricultural and rural sectors with the cooperation of government, civil society and the rural community.

www.enpard.ge

RURAL ISSUES, RURAL PERSPECTIVES

A new lease of life

European Landowners' Organization (ELO)

Erasmus + project showcases entrepreneurial approaches to the re-use of agricultural buildings.



European
Landowners'
Organization
(ELO)

legal@elo.org

REVAB – REuse and Valorisation of Agricultural Buildings through training based on real experiences – is an Erasmus+ project that completed its activities in 2018. Designed to facilitate the exchange of good practices, REVAB has developed a free and open-access training system on entrepreneurial approaches to the re-use of agricultural buildings.

By gathering real-life examples from Bulgaria, Germany, Italy, Poland and Spain of rural entrepreneurs who have re-purposed agricultural buildings, REVAB encourages people to think about how to re-use their own constructions.

Agricultural buildings are an important part of the built heritage of rural areas, they are often linked to local traditions and the identity of surrounding areas because of the work that once went on in them. Giving such buildings a new function is a great way to breathe new life into them and to allow rural entrepreneurs to generate additional income.

The REVAB training modules take the learner through a series of steps involved in successfully completing a re-use project. These include idea development and how it will link with the existing farm business, financing, potential local contacts, and administrative and legal issues. The training modules are integrated with the lessons learned from 16 case studies of people who have undertaken a wide array of such projects. For instance, a Bulgarian woman converted a dilapidated and unusable garage into a drugstore so the people in the village now have somewhere to buy basic medical supplies and an Italian couple converted an abandoned farmhouse in Tuscany into tourist apartments, a restaurant, and a shop for agricultural produce.

The contribution of REVAB was recently highlighted in the European Economic and Social Committee's (EESC) opinion on 'The contribution of Europe's rural areas to the 2018 Year of Cultural Heritage ensuring sustainability and urban/rural cohesion'.



© REVAB

Barn therapy

REVAB Case Study

Having worked on the family farm, Andras Lackmann from Glandorf (Germany) re-trained as a physiotherapist and wanted to start his own business. He decided to develop modern sports facilities in a former barn that had been used to store machinery and for cattle husbandry.

The barn was divided into two areas: an unheated area for training and a heated treatment area. The traditional architectural character of the old barn gives the facilities a welcoming atmosphere that has proven to be very popular with his clientele.

As the practice is situated in the countryside, it motivates people to do more outdoor activities, be it exercises (for instance, using tractor tires), outdoor yoga, or availing of a running trail. There are plans to extend the sports facilities into the second floor of the barn and to develop another building.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

REVAB project:
www.revab-erasmus.eu

EESC report:
www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/contribution-europes-rural-areas-2018-year-cultural-heritage

A FOCUS ON... COMMUNICATIONS

INTRODUCTION

Effective communications

Rural development networkers are embracing the latest digital technology and enhancing proven networking techniques to become more effective in their outreach activity. This edition of Rural Connections uncovers the latest thinking and profiles some inspiring communications practices that support Rural Development policy implementation.

The communications techniques used by rural development practitioners have evolved since the outset of the current programming period. Whereas Article 54 (3) of the Rural Development Regulation⁽¹⁾ specifies that National Rural Networks (NRNs) should have a communications plan to guide their activities, it leaves the choice of what and how to communicate firmly in the hands of the networkers.

An ENRD workshop in June 2018 brought together those dealing with rural development communication tasks in NRNs – primarily Network Support Unit (NSU) representatives – to exchange on the latest practices and to discover what others are doing to improve their communication activities at both the national and European levels. There was significant interest in the topic. Over 70 participants came together to learn from their colleagues.

Across the ENRD, networkers are enthusiastically embracing new technology and looking to improve their communications techniques. Whatever communication channel they use, the objective is to be effective



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in: increasing the involvement of stakeholders in the implementation of Rural Development policy; improving the quality of implementation of the Rural Development Programmes (RDPs); informing potential beneficiaries about funding opportunities; and fostering innovation in rural areas.

Taking inspiration from the ENRD workshop, this thematic section highlights cutting-edge practice being applied today in the rural development space. It features useful approaches to developing a communications strategy, to creating engaging content and to evaluating the communications effort.

A case study about how the Finnish NSU is using 'personas' to create user-centric communications and a practitioner interview outlining how DG AGRI approaches social media provide a

flavour of the challenges communications practitioners face and the solutions they find to resolve them. A range of inspiring practices from Belgium, Estonia, Italy and Sweden are also profiled.

Do you have a successful communications experience that others could learn from? If so, get in touch with the ENRD at publication@enrd.eu and tell us all about it!

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

ENRD Workshop on NRN Communication:
https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/enrd-workshop-nrn-communication_en

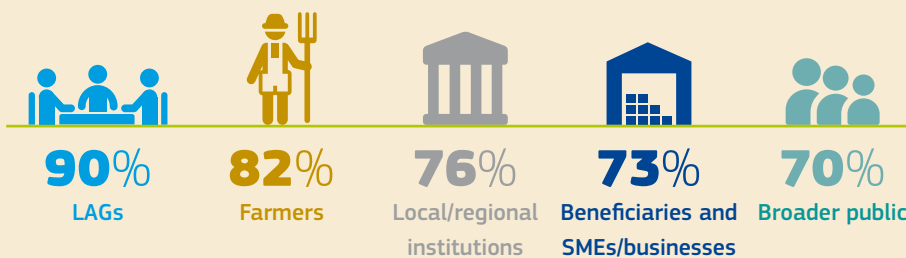
(1) Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32013R1305>

Network Communications

The May 2018 ENRD survey of National Rural Networks (NRNs), which saw 27 out of the 32 Network Support Units respond, highlights current communications practice within the networks.

Target groups


















The top 5 target groups for NRNs



Most used communication channels



Information type by target group

	RDP funding opportunities	Cooperation offers	National news & events	Good project examples	Benefits of the policy
 Local Action Groups (LAGs)					
 Farmers					
 Local/regional institutions					
 Project beneficiaries and rural SMEs/businesses					
 Broader public					

A FOCUS ON... COMMUNICATIONS

REPORT

Getting the mix right

Today's rural development networkers have more communication channels to choose from than ever. As technology improves, webinars, podcasting and social media offer enticing new possibilities. But more choice does not imply more effectiveness. Knowing your audience remains central in deciding how to engage and what communication techniques to use.

An ENRD workshop in June 2018 brought a group of communicators from NRNs together to exchange on the latest thinking. A key message from the event was that communicators need to use the communications mix in a way that makes most sense for their specific situation and objectives. Tried and trusted communications tools will continue to play an important role in rural development, alongside new digital possibilities. This section profiles some good practices showcased at the ENRD workshop.

OPEN DAYS (ESTONIA)



© Estonian Network Support Unit

Open Farm Day is an annual fair that is successfully promoting local products and raising awareness about rural life with the general public in Estonia. It is a great example of scaling up. The initiative began at the local level, but has grown to become a national event.

The Network Support Unit (NSU) collaborated closely with the Estonian Ministry of Rural Affairs to engage further Local Action Groups (LAGs) and farmers' organisations in order to raise awareness and increase the number of open farms.

Back in 2012, two LAGs began organising annual visits to promote their local farms, products and small businesses. They in turn had been inspired by the island of Åland (Finland) where the locals have been organising such events for the past 21 years.

Seeing the communications potential, the NSU thought it would be excellent if the practice could be extended across the country. Thus, the first large-scale Open Farm Day was organised in 2015. The Ministry for Rural Affairs helped to increase visibility and get more actors involved. With almost 150 farms involved and 45000 visitors, the initiative was a real success. The Open Farm Day has been organised every year since.

“ It is the best initiative organised by the state with such a big influence on the image of rural areas. ”

Participating farmer

The NSU considers this type of event as an opportunity to explain and promote the Rural Development Programme (RDP) to the broader public, but also to engage farmers and locals. The role of the Ministry is vital: it is the lead organiser and it

maintains communication with the media, and produces supporting materials, such as video clips and leaflets, to promote the event.

By 2018, some 296 farms were open for visits, attracting more than 160 000 visitors. The event has been praised for being a strong voice promoting rural life and rural areas, as well as raising awareness of the many possibilities such areas have to offer. This year's edition included a photo competition for visitors who could share pictures of their visit on the Facebook event page and had a chance to win a prize.

“It was a good opportunity to visit the farms nearby and to know that I can buy local produce directly from them.”

Visitor

To assess fully the results and impact of the event, the NSU has held feedback seminars and meetings with farmers and locals involved in the organisation and the Ministry gets online feedback from the visitors.

Coordinating with farmers, agricultural organisations and locals to set up the

programmes, promotional materials and dissemination requires quite a lot of work, but it is worth the time and effort: the results are exceeding the expectations of all those involved.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Open Farm Day website:
www.avatudtalud.ee/en

Facebook page: www.facebook.com/events/1753794027964630/

Promotional video: www.youtube.com/watch?v=L9klHnSDXfU

PLANNING FOR SUCCESS (ITALY)

The Managing Authority (MA) in Veneto (a region of north-eastern Italy) has decided to significantly increase the resources it allocates to communications and its detailed communications plan includes a strong focus on monitoring and evaluation.

To deliver on its strategic objectives, the Veneto MA has put in place an ambitious plan for its communications. The MA already had a communications strategy in place defining the objectives for the whole programming period – the EAFRD implementing Regulation 808/2014⁽¹⁾ requires all MAs to have an information and publicity strategy for their Rural Development Programme (RDP). However, the Veneto MA decided to invigorate its communications work. The result is an operational communications plan (*Piano di Comunicazione* – PdC) 2017-2020 that specifies how to pursue the strategic goals in practice.

The budget allocated for the PdC is over €1 m. This represents a 35% increase in communications expenditure compared to the previous three years.



The plan was built upon the results of a thorough audience analysis. The three main target groups of the RDP – citizens, actual and potential beneficiaries, and stakeholders were analysed by an external agency that specialises in social and marketing research. The PdC takes into account the specific context the Veneto MA operates in, its audience needs and expectations, and defines clear and quantifiable objectives.

“A communication strategy not built on a preliminary collection of objective data would be neither useful or effective.”

Alessandro Tomasutti,
coordinator of the PdC in the Veneto MA

The plan includes a continuous and systematic monitoring of communication work and results as one of its nine activity areas. It defines indicators – for activities,

(1) <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/fa3a62cf-1878-11e4-933d-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

results and impacts – to measure topics that include the popularity of the RDP among citizens, the improvement of beneficiaries' knowledge about the RDP, and the degree of engagement of the MA's partners.

The indicator results form part of a quarterly monitoring report. A mid-term evaluation is to be carried out along with a final analysis in 2020. These data will allow the overall results of the first three years of the strategy implementation to be assessed.

One of the communications activities foreseen in the PdC is the collection of 100 'good practices' implemented in the Veneto region with European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) support to convey more clearly the role and impact of the RDP. The MA collaborated with the regional paying authority, AVEPA, to carefully study and select the cases that best illustrate the six Rural Development priorities in the 2014-2020 programming period.

To make the communications effort more compelling, the collected good practice stories are displayed on an interactive map on the MA website. In addition to a short text summarising the key information and highlighting the added value of the EAFRD funding, each example is accompanied by a video interview with the beneficiaries. The audio-visual element provides a personal and more appealing tone to the content.

The stories database is a source for various communication activities ranging from the website, social media, events – where beneficiaries provide RDP 'testimonials' – to relations with the press. The videos will also be combined as a web series illustrating RDP priorities.

Interestingly, the MA also chose to produce a video about the communications plan itself. The idea is to explain to stakeholders the efforts the MA is making to disseminate



© European Union

knowledge about the RDP, its objectives and impacts, and to multiply the results.

The video is also a deliberate attempt to prompt a reflection about the role of communication: rather than be seen as a simple box-ticking exercise, the communications effort should instead be understood as a management tool to help achieve rural development objectives and for which the role of the communications professional is essential.

“ *We would like the communications plan to be the first step towards the full integration of our institutional communications with the policy approach.* ”

Alessandro Tomasutti

Belief in the benefits of communications is evidenced not only by the increased financial outlay, the MA has also invested in its human resources. The PdC is managed by an external agency selected via a public tender; within the MA, a specialist in institutional communications works full time on its coordination, and three other employees – a contract manager, an office manager and an administrative, technical and financial officer – invest around 50% of their working time on communications.

While the results of the communication strategy will only become clear after

the mid-term and final evaluations, the Veneto MA are already receiving positive feedback. The main lesson learnt so far is that the development of an ambitious communications plan requires a careful preliminary evaluation of the impact on the organisation, in terms of budgets, human resources and efforts. Noting the context in which public administrations work, it is crucial to ensure that the administrative, programming and technical levels share the same approach and vision.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Communication plan of the Veneto MA: <https://psrveneto.it/psr-2014-2020/comunicazione/>

Video stories: <https://psrveneto.it/sviluppo-rurale/>

DIGITAL BROADCASTING (SWEDEN)

The Swedish Network Support Unit (NSU) has added podcasting and webinars to its communications mix. The podcasts reach a wide audience while the webinars go deeper into specific topics that are attractive for a niche audience.

PODCAST



'Landet – the podcast that takes you beyond the big cities' is a series of inspirational discussions focused on Swedish rural areas. Committed and knowledgeable people from the Swedish NSU – ranging from practitioners to national experts – share their views and knowledge on hot

topics in 20-minute episodes available at the Swedish NRN, website as well as on the most common apps for podcasts, such as iTunes, Acast, SoundCloud and Stitcher. Today's digital technology means that broadcasting, or perhaps more accurately 'narrowcasting', is no longer the preserve of radio or television companies.

The NSU uses the podcast to disseminate easily accessible information on general rural development topics, including EU programmes. A new episode is released every two weeks, all year around. A strong marketing strategy – including promotional short films shared on Facebook one week before a new podcast release, newsletters, Facebook and Twitter campaigns and Instagram – promote the podcast content.

“Our podcast offers a mix of topics, those of interest to specific groups and more general podcasts to attract new listeners, such as about how rural areas are portrayed on film and tv.”

Maria Gustafsson, Swedish NSU

The results are impressive, the podcast series which targets the general public has over 37 500 unique listeners and around 1 700 subscribers since the launch of the first episode in March 2016. Each podcast requires about 20 hours of work for a freelance presenter, which includes trips, editing, photography, a teaser video and script preparation. A further 20 working hours per month are needed for the network's in-house team for the preparation and post-production.

At the time of writing, 66 podcasts had been produced. Finding new content is not a problem: there are many topics to choose from and listeners regularly suggest new topics through comments on social media. The main challenge, especially at the beginning, was to build awareness for the show in a crowded podcast marketplace and to plan the dissemination effectively. Having a former journalist, Ingrid Whitelock, as the Swedish NSU's communications coordinator has facilitated relations with the media.



The initial idea of podcasting came from the NRN's Thematic Group on 'Young People in Rural Development'. However, Ingrid's advice to colleagues willing to replicate the experience in other countries is "to think long term and to be credible, but at the same time be entertaining and easily accessible. To get it done, you must have a clear picture of the target groups which vary in different countries. Perform a thorough audience analysis before starting your podcast."

WEBINAR



The Swedish NSU – sometimes in collaboration with member organisations and agencies – produces 'Landet Lär', a series of 45-minute-long webinars. The interactive online seminars allow experts to share their knowledge about Swedish rural areas and coastal communities with a group of selected participants. The webinars target a more specific audience and topics have included social integration, fossil-free energy, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and municipal transport.

A new webinar is organised every three weeks. Both the discussion topics and the experts presenting are chosen by the NRN's Thematic Groups. Webinar promotion is done through events and paid posts on social media (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram), and through targeted invitations sent via Adobe Connect, the platform used to host the webinar, to people interested in the work of the Thematic Group that selected



© Swedish Network Support Unit

the topic. Recordings of each webinar can be watched on the NRN website.

“Easy to participate and good presentations. Saves a lot of time.”

Comment from webinar user

In terms of cost, the hosting platform requires an annual payment. The NSU communication team takes care of the production and technical set-up of the webinars. Most of the experts participate for free as a part of their engagement in the Thematic Group.

The 11 webinars produced between January and September 2018 averaged around 40 participants per webinar. "Since it takes time to establish a brand, this is a good result," notes Sara Uddemar, in charge of the webinar organisation at the NSU. She adds that "you don't have to be an expert to run webinars and it's pretty easy to learn the basics".

The webinar, like the podcast, is a technology that reaches all over Sweden. Webinars thus provide a practical way to reach people who would otherwise find

it difficult to attend a regular seminar. As such, both digital channels make it easier to share knowledge. What is more, the evaluation forms filled in after each webinar show that 83% of participants have gained new knowledge from the event and think they will benefit from it.

For those looking to launch their own webinar, Sara's advice is: "Just try it!" However, she notes that "the technical platform must be tested carefully before launch. In the end, success depends entirely on the audience actually hearing what the lecturer says."

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Podcast: www.landsbyggsnatverket.se/pagang/poddenlandet

Webinar: www.landsbyggsnatverket.se/pagang/landetlar

COMMUNICATING INNOVATION (BELGIUM)

Events have long been a way to foster knowledge transfer and build capacity for networkers. The 'Innovation Route' is a series of carefully designed farm-based events that are promoting innovative thinking in Belgium.

An objective of all National Rural Networks (NRNs) is to foster innovation in agriculture, food production, forestry and rural areas. To meet this challenge, the Walloon Network Support Unit (NSU) ran a series of events to encourage the engagement of local rural actors and to stimulate innovation.

The 'Innovation Route' (*Route de l'Innovation*), launched in 2017 and running for 18 months, comprised six farm-based events and a final seminar which summarised the knowledge accumulated along the way. Videos were made of each event and published on the network's website to help broaden knowledge transfer and enhance farm competitiveness through innovation.

Hosting the event on farms was a key success factor. Farms were quite literally at the centre of the interactive and practical discussion. Participants varied according to the event and included agricultural advisors, researchers, scientists, business representatives and consumers. The

farmers thus received peer-to-peer and business-to-consumer advice and exchanged in the context of their own farms, which allowed them to see their strengths and weaknesses from an external perspective.

By having the event on a farm, participants could gain insight and exchange practical knowledge about innovative agricultural systems, seeing the techniques being implemented in a real-life situation. A 'community of practice' approach helped to create a dynamic vision of agricultural innovation, link it to changing economic, environmental and social contexts, and improve interactions between farmers and the wider community in their area.

The innovation route events were well attended, with an average of 50 participants per farm. The initiative has led to the creation of several EIP-AGRI Operational Groups to further exchange on specific topics of interest. Findings and recommendations from the 'Innovation Route' that support competitive and sustainable agriculture in Wallonia may contribute to future adaptations of the Rural Development Programme.



© Walloon Network Support Unit

“ Innovation is characterised by the ability of farmers not only to adopt new techniques, but also to adapt them to their situation and their project. One of the most interesting examples was that of a breeder trying to adapt a milking robot. The modification has led the producer to change the model so as to suit the needs of breeders. ”

Xavier Delmon, Walloon NSU



© Walloon Network Support Unit

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Innovation Route: www.reseau-pwdr.be/news/route-de-linnovation

A FOCUS ON... COMMUNICATIONS

BETTER TARGETING

User-centric communications

The Finnish Network Support Unit (NSU) has reshaped its approach to content creation so that its communication products resonate more strongly with its target audiences.

RE-IMAGINING A WEBSITE

In 2017, the Finnish NSU decided to revamp its website. The decision was based on the realisation that the existing website – a joint website for the Rural Development Programme (RDP) and the National Rural Network (NRN) – used the same messages and style to reach two target groups with very different information needs. One group consisted of users with extensive knowledge of the RDPs (Finland has two RDPs) who were looking for detailed and technical information, whereas the second – potential new beneficiaries – tend to find technical or bureaucratic jargon unattractive or even discouraging.

The communications team – comprising a specialist from the Managing Authority, one from the Paying Agency and two from the NSU – gathered to think about the real people visiting the website. Through a workshop they identified seven distinct ‘personas’ and to help bring them to life, they gave each one a name, occupation, age and outlined the kind of information each would want from the website.

The fictional personas now guide the content creation and especially the style of writing used on the website. The new home page features inspiring stories from the Finnish countryside, showing projects supported under the RDPs. The stories are tailored for different audiences (such as entrepreneurs, farmers and young people). The process has seen a tone change for the whole website, even the sections specifically for users familiar with the RDPs.

“We realised that on the old website some of the texts were really bureaucratic

‘mumbo jumbo’. So we re-wrote everything. We constantly had the person who would read the text in mind rather than solely focusing on what we need to have on the website,” explains Sinikka Torssonen of the Finnish NSU.

Naturally, the website also contains information for those who are very familiar with RDPs, including the latest news and more technical content. A very successful feature of the website is the new alphabetical index available from the main menu.

The website – which is available in Finnish, Swedish and English in a reduced version – is now reaching more people. The statistics show increasing total user numbers, plenty of which are new. Most new visitors, sometimes up to 80% of the weekly total, arrive via social media, primarily via Facebook and to a lesser extent Twitter. The biggest remaining challenge is to help the users quickly

USER PERSONAS



Raimo is 60 years old and owns a small farm.



Jyri is a 34-year-old farmer from Vääksy. He is married and has two children.



Riitta is a 54-year-old entrepreneur who owns a catering business.



Sara is 19 years old. She is an active and energetic youngster.



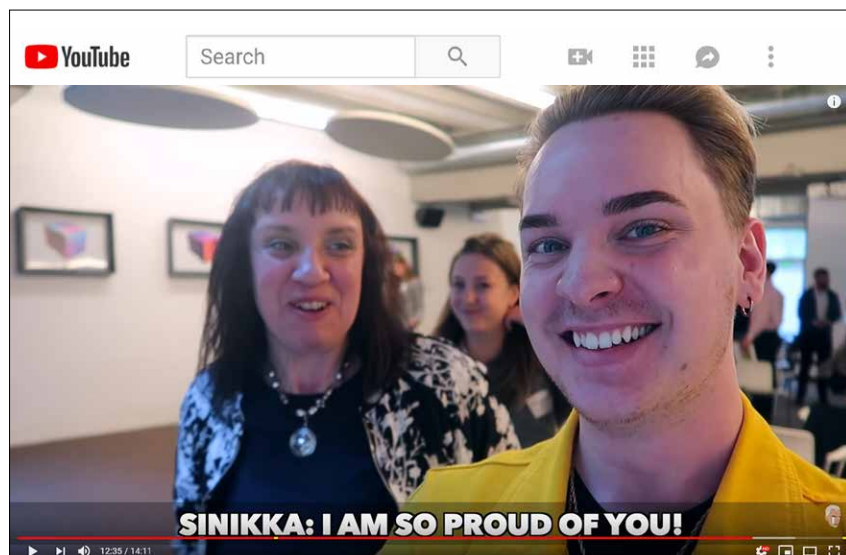
Pasi is 45 years old, lives in Siilinjärvi where he runs a small import business.



Seppo is 49 years old and works for the regional authority.



Marja is 47 years old and works as a LAG manager in Lapland.



navigate to the content that addresses their specific information needs.

WORKING WITH INFLUENCERS

While the communications team was rightly proud of its efforts to deliver usercentric content it also realised that the NRN's communications channels may not be able to reach certain target groups. The Finnish NSU has therefore started to experiment with social media influencers, i.e. a popular user on social media who can potentially influence others by virtue of their authenticity and reach.

YouTube is the most wide-spread social media in Finland and youth vloggers are very popular. One such vlogger is Joona Hellman who lives in a rural area and has over 93 000 followers on YouTube (in a country of five million inhabitants).

On the occasion of an ENRD workshop on rural youth organised by the ENRD Contact Point in Brussels in May 2018, the Finnish NSU invited the vlogger to make a presentation. Joona published a video of his trip to Brussels on Youtube and posted on Instagram and Snapchat while travelling and after the video was published.

The video quickly reached over 23 000 views and generated almost 300 comments from his fans. This level of engagement is immense compared to the reach of the NSU's typical videos. Previously, the most successful video on their YouTube channel had 1 300 views.

Evaluation of working with an influencer is not straightforward, but Sinikka Torssonen (Finnish NSU) is very positive about the experience: "we reached audiences we would never have reached on our own. When trying to reach youngsters, this kind of communication is really working well. It is, though, important to choose the right kind of YouTuber with the right kind of followers."

Joona Hellman's audience represents a potentially relevant target group that could be interested in rural policies and attracted

to the NRN website. His viewers received three key messages: 95 % of Finland is rural; rural people have power to influence what happens in rural areas; and rural young people can make their ideas come true – with the help of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). When cooperating with an influencer, key messages can be defined, but to remain authentic, the vlogger delivers them in their own voice.

Joona Hellman did not try to change his trademark style and this was the key to the video's success. Sinikka Torssonen is clear about the main lesson learnt: "instead of always trying to attract new people to your channels, sometimes it makes sense to find someone who already reaches those you want to talk to".

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Website in Finnish: www.maaseutu.fi

Website in Swedish: www.landsbygqd.fi

Website in English: www.rural.fi

Joona video on Youtube: www.youtube.com/watch?v=YiOYT34CKIg

A FOCUS ON... COMMUNICATIONS

INTERVIEW


What happens when one of the EU's oldest policies meets one of the world's latest communications technology?

Ian McCafferty

Political and Digital Communications Team Leader at the European Commission's Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development (DG AGRI), explains how his organisation approaches social media.



© Ian McCafferty


 **Which social media channels do you manage for DG AGRI and why did you choose those?**

DG AGRI is present on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and, most recently, Instagram.

Facebook and Twitter are a classic combination to capture hearts and minds online. Facebook is perfect for community building and network connection, Twitter is the place for the latest news and announcements, often focused on policy-making, events and media trends.

YouTube is great for 'how to' content, tricks and tips, vlogging, and behind-the-scenes content. It is also good for Search Engine Optimisation: as Google owns YouTube, your content is more likely to show up in a Google search result. You can also categorise your videos into playlists, making it easier for users to search for related content.

Instagram is 'the home of food': the perfect platform to host snaps of quality agri-food and some shots of the production processes.

 **How do you adapt your content and tone to different social media platforms?**

Content should match the platform. Say you're communicating about cheese. On Instagram, you post a high-resolution picture capturing the quality of the product and talk about how tasty it is. On Facebook, you show a picture of the producer and say a little bit about the person behind the product. Twitter is where you emphasise how the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has improved quality dairy production and increased overseas demand, including an infographic or illustrative video. Finally, on YouTube, your video goes behind-the-scenes of the cheese-making process or offers interesting recipes to bring that added 'how to' value to the audience.

Tone depends on the platform and the situation. You may be less formal on Facebook than on Twitter, for example, and you wouldn't talk about a tasty piece of Parma ham the same way you'd talk about African Swine Fever, would you?

Adapting tone and content helps you to target different audience groups.

How do you increase your social media outreach and how do you expand your audience?

The easiest way to get more people to see your post is to pay for it! Using paid social media promotion can help you reach more of your target audience. But a good communication strategy includes a mix of both paid and organic posts.

Regardless of whether you use paid or organic content, there are a few tricks you can use. Create engaging content that people will react to, so it shows in more timelines (you can use striking visuals, ask questions, or use more naturally interactive posts, such as Twitter polls or Facebook carousels).

Figure out when your audience is most active – e.g. using Facebook Insights or Followerwonk – and post then. Engage in ‘social listening’: look for engagement opportunities – relevant events, international days and trends – and join the conversation by using key hashtags, if relevant.

To expand your audience, you need to make sure that your posts provide some sort of added value to the people you reach. Who is your target audience? Why should they follow you? Do you have something interesting to tell them or something useful to share?

How do you generate and manage two-way communication – actual interaction with users?

I categorise community management into: the good, the bad, and the ugly. Engage with the **good**, even if it's just to say thanks. Try to engage with the **bad**, i.e. comments (from real people) that are negative, but not nasty. Don't match their tone, but try to address their concern. Get rid of the **ugly**: swearing, spamming and being overtly offensive should have

no place on your public page. Explore your options (hiding, muting, deleting, blocking) and decide what is the best course of action.

It's quite useful to have a moderation policy in place – I wrote one for the main European Commission Facebook page, which is publicly available.

Should every institution be present and/or active on social media?

No institution should be on social media simply for the sake of it. One of the main reasons people have problems with social media is because they don't know why they're there in the first place – “because everybody else is doing it” is not a valid reason!

Think about what your organisation/institution seeks to achieve. Then ask yourself: how can communication help you achieve these objectives? This gives you a communication strategy, of which social media are just one element – together with radio, tv, print media etc. Put it in perspective and you will better understand if you should be present on social media.

Can you share some tips for organisations using social media?

Understand where social media fits in your communications strategy and how this relates to your objectives.

Identify your main messages and target audience – write them down.

Try to keep your branding consistent across platforms: use the same handle, profile picture, colour scheme, visual branding (using logos in pictures for example) and hashtags.

Be realistic. Social media management takes a lot of time and effort. If it's just something you do when you have twenty minutes to spare, you're probably better off taking that time to go for a nice walk. You'll feel better.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Twitter polls:

<https://help.twitter.com/en/using-twitter/twitter-polls>

Facebook carousels:

www.facebook.com/business/learn/facebook-create-ad-carousel-ads

Facebook Insights:

www.facebook.com/business/news/audience-insights

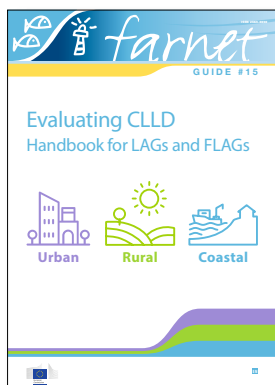
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European Commission Facebook Moderation Policy page:

www.facebook.com/notes/european-commission/moderation-policy/959130604105346

Books & publications



Evaluating CLLD: Handbook for LAGs and FLAGs

FARNET

The handbook is intended for Local Action Groups (LAGs) and fisheries LAGs funded under one or several of the EU's Structural and Investment Funds, as well as for external LAG evaluators.

It provides easy-to-use evaluation tools, methods and practical examples from different LAGs and FLAGs that can serve as guidance and inspiration for optimising the use of public funding, evaluating and improving the application of Community-led Local Development (CLLD).

The handbook is available in English, French, German, Italian, Spanish and Polish.

ISBN 978-92-79-85772-0

2018 Rural Youth survey report

Rural Youth Project

This report overviews the main findings of a survey on rural youth carried out by the Scottish Rural Youth Project, which ran between January and June 2018.

The survey collected the opinions of

over 750 young people, aged 18-28, living or working in rural areas in Australia, Canada, Sweden, the UK and the USA.

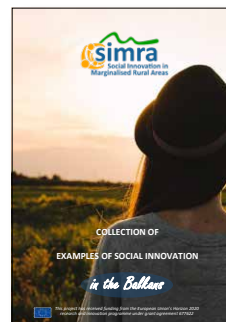
The survey revealed that despite challenges

regarding transport, access to services, employment and connectivity – and the fact that only 13% feel they have a say in the future of their communities – more than 70% of young people living in rural areas feel optimistic about their future. However, 26% of respondents planned to move to a town or city.



Collection of examples of social innovation

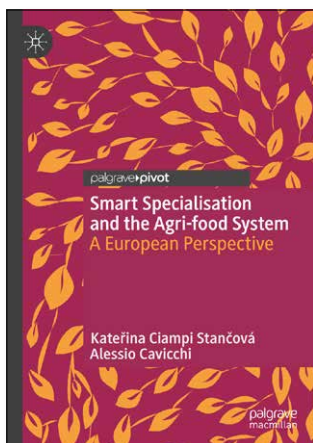
Social Innovation in Marginalised Rural Areas (SIMRA)



The latest brochures produced by the Horizon 2020 research project SIMRA bring together good practice examples of social innovation in mountain areas and the Western Balkans.

The brochure on mountain areas looks at how communities capitalise on the natural and social assets in mountainous areas in terms of community life, living environment, and dynamic approaches to governance.

The brochure exploring the Western Balkans overviews societal challenges faced in countries of the region and innovative solutions emerging in their rural areas in fields such as healthcare, rural networking and tourism development.



Smart Specialisation and the Agri-food System

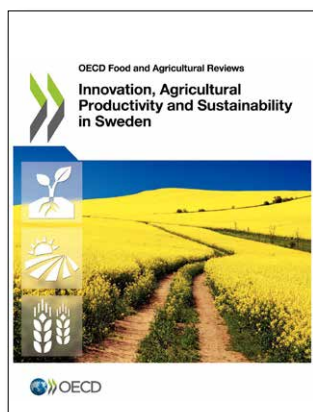
Kateřina Ciampi Stančová and Alessio Cavicchi

The book addresses the newly emerging interest in agri-food systems and the effect on the European countryside and regional development patterns.

It discusses recent innovation and diversification paths in agri-food, specifically the linkages among food research and innovation (R&I), production, consumption, gastronomy, place branding, and technology.

In addition, it overviews EU policies (agriculture, food, cohesion), research (agri-food, management, business, regional development), and practice (local/regional development patterns, promotion of high-quality agri-food products, sustainable development) within the context of smart specialisation.

ISBN 978-3-319-91500-5



Innovation, Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability in Sweden and Estonia

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

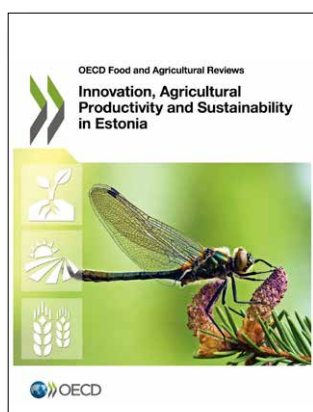
Part of an OECD series, these reviews provide comprehensive assessments of the countries' agricultural policies, reform efforts and their potential impacts.

Agricultural innovation in Sweden has contributed to the competitiveness and sustainability of the agri-food sector, resulting in high levels of consumer confidence in the quality and methods of food production. However, challenges such as high production costs and adapting new technologies highlight a need for further structural adjustments and better targeted investments in the agri-food sector.

Estonian agriculture has undergone significant growth and structural change since the 1990s and the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has contributed to the modernisation of the sector, leading to high productivity growth with relatively limited environmental pressure. Nevertheless, attracting and retaining people in the sector is an increasing challenge requiring further innovation and adaptation.

ISBN 9789264085268 (Sweden)

ISBN 9789264288744 (Estonia)



ENRD PUBLICATIONS

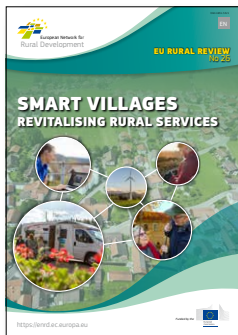
Keep up to date with all the latest news, views and developments in European rural development by reading the various ENRD publications.

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EU RURAL REVIEW

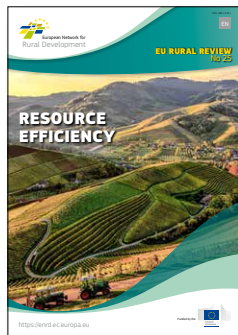
The EU Rural Review is the ENRD's principal thematic publication. It presents the latest knowledge and understanding of a particular topic relevant to rural development in Europe. Themes range from rural entrepreneurship and food quality to climate change and social inclusion. It is published twice a year in six EU languages (EN; FR; DE; ES; IT; PL).

No.26 – Smart Villages: Revitalising Rural Services



KF-AJ-18-001-EN-N

No.25 – Resource Efficiency



KF-AJ-17-002-EN-N

No.24 – Re-imagining rural business opportunities



KF-AJ-17-001-EN-N

EAFRD PROJECTS BROCHURE

The ENRD publishes brochures presenting good and interesting examples of EAFRD-funded projects. Each edition highlights successful project examples around a particular rural development theme. The brochures aim to showcase the achievements of the EAFRD and inspire further projects. They are published in six EU languages (EN; FR; DE; ES; IT; PL).

Digital and Social Innovation in Rural Services



KF-AP-18-002-EN-N

Resource Efficient Rural Economies



KF-AP-18-001-EN-N

Supporting Rural Business



KF-AP-17-002-EN-N

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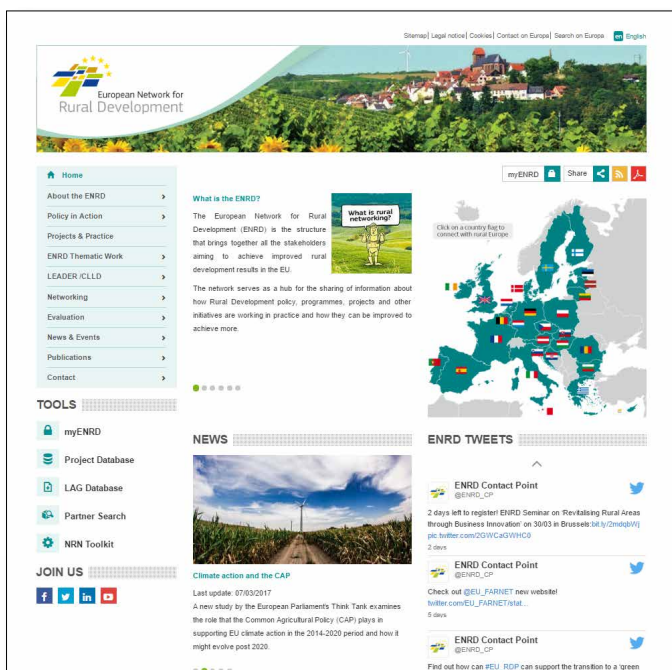
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from the delegations in non-EU countries (http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/index_en.htm);
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