

CONNECTIONS

THE EUROPEAN RURAL DEVELOPMENT MAGAZINE

NEWS AND UPDATES

- **LEADER: EMPOWERING, CONNECTING, INNOVATING**
- **RURAL INSPIRATION AWARDS**
- **15TH AND 16TH NRN MEETINGS**

RURAL ISSUES, RURAL PERSPECTIVES

- **SOCIETIES OUTSIDE THE METROPOLISES**
- **THE DARK CHARM OF THE SWEDISH COUNTRYSIDE**
- **RESULTS BASED PAYMENT SCHEMES**

FOCUS ON...

GOOD PRACTICES



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>)

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EDITORIAL



Welcome to the first edition of the Rural Connections magazine in 2020! This new issue comes at a moment of global health crisis due to the coronavirus outbreak. The contents were prepared earlier in the year and so do not touch upon the current situation. However, examples of rural responses to the COVID-19 crisis are being collected on the ENRD website, gathering projects and initiatives primarily launched by rural communities in coping with the COVID-19 emergency, supporting farmers, rural businesses and fostering solidarity with those more vulnerable in this exceptional situation. The page also provides information about European Commission initiatives and actions aimed at alleviating the current difficulties faced by rural Europe. We hope this will provide support and inspiration to other rural stakeholders and we welcome your contributions at editor@enrd.eu.

In the **News** section (pp. 4-12) we give you more details about the new European Parliament and the new Commission, both with ambitious plans for the climate and environment, and rural areas. In the same section we also provide updates from the European network and tell you about recent changes within the ENRD Contact Point team.

Last year we celebrated the power of networking for rural development at the networX event. One of the take-away messages from the event was that networking is about curiosity, and we should 'be curious' – about people, projects and other networks. And we are taking the advice seriously! This round of Rural Issues, **Rural Perspectives** (pp. 13-29) ranges from populism in rural areas to an agro-ecology project in the Netherlands, from a sociologist's view on networking to Results Based Payment Schemes, with a detour through (fictional) rural crimes.

We then **Focus on...** good practices in the use of EAFRD funding (pp. 30-42). The collection and dissemination of project examples is a key task of National Rural Networks and a powerful way to show the impact of European funding in rural areas across Europe. This is how rural networks can communicate positive messages about European initiatives, another recommendation we heard at networX. Good practices can also inspire other rural communities and stakeholders. This section of the magazine, based on the precious contribution of several NRNs, gives an overview of different approaches to the collection and dissemination of EAFRD-funded projects at the national level. It also includes expert advice on communication and looks at demonstration farms as one way to disseminate good practices.

The power of networking is to connect people – and this magazine is one of our ways to establish and nurture meaningful connections. If you have comments on the content, suggestions for future editions, or simply want to get in touch, we are always happy to hear from you.

Enjoy the read!

Elena Di Federico

Publications Manager, ENRD Contact Point

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NEWS & UPDATES

ENRD NEWS



LEADER: empowering, connecting, innovating

The recent months have been busy for the European LEADER community and the ENRD Contact Point's LEADER team.

In **three new videos** produced by the ENRD, LEADER practitioners from different countries describe how LEADER empowers and connects rural communities and how it brings about innovations. The videos are available on the ENRD's YouTube channel.

The latest edition of the **EU Rural Review** (no. 29) looks at '**LEADER Achievements**'. Thanks to LEADER practitioners (and enthusiasts) from around Europe, readers can learn how the seven LEADER principles work in practice, how they deliver results and ensure sustained performance over time, and how they are adaptable to deal with the emerging challenges and opportunities facing rural areas.

The LEADER videos, relevant publications and much more can be found in the new **LEADER resources** section of the ENRD website, a one-stop shop for news, publications and tools for practitioners and other stakeholders. Here you can also find an updated version of the **LEADER toolkit**, released in summer 2019, which serves as a guidebook for beginners and a reference source and check list for more advanced users.

Because LEADER connects with many other rural development topics, the ENRD is organising a series of **LEADER Thematic Labs** to explore exactly those connections. Three Thematic Labs have already taken place, looking at the interaction between LEADER and – respectively – Smart Villages (October 2019), climate change mitigation and adaptation (December 2019), and youth and generational renewal in rural areas (February 2020). The event pages of the ENRD website collect the many experiences shared and the outcomes of the discussions. A fourth LEADER Thematic Lab is planned in early summer 2020 – more details will follow soon.

The **7th meeting of the LEADER/CLLD Sub-group** of the Rural Networks' Assembly (Brussels, 4 February 2020) discussed updates on LEADER implementation and the state-of-play of proposals relating to LEADER/CLLD in the post-2020 CAP Strategic Plans. The ENRD Seminar 'Designing LEADER for the future', scheduled on 10 March, had unfortunately to be cancelled due to the coronavirus outbreak. The good news is that many interesting materials prepared for the event are available on the ENRD website.

Back in autumn 2019, the ENRD Contact Point participated in the LEADER-Inspired Network Community (LINC) conference in Parnu, Estonia. LINC2019 brought together more than

350 participants (including over 110 LAGs) from 17 EU MS and one non-EU country, Georgia, to discuss and exchange experiences of innovative LEADER practices. The conference featured nine study trips, a Cooperation Corner Seminar, and a sports competition for participating LAGs.

The ENRD Contact Point also supported the organisation and facilitation of the fourth joint CLLD event on 'Post 2020: Local Action in a Changing World' in Brussels on 3-4 December 2019. The event provided insights into how CLLD is changing lives in rural, coastal and urban areas alike and brought together 450 stakeholders, including over 75 LEADER LAGs, to share their knowledge and experience from across the European Structural and Investment Funds. It included an exhibition of 40 CLLD-supported projects from across each of the Funds, thematic working groups and a panel discussion between local beneficiaries and high-level decision-makers. The ENRD Contact Point identified and helped present 15 project examples for the exhibition.

Keep following the ENRD website, newsletter and social media for updates! #LeaderCLLD


 FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

LEADER resources, including past and future ENRD events:
https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader-clld/leader-resources_en

EU Rural Review 29 'LEADER Achievements':
https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/publications/eu-rural-review-29-leader-achievements_en

ENRD on YouTube:
<https://www.youtube.com/user/EURural>

How to work with Smart Villages? Orientations for LEADER LAGs:
https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/publications/how-work-smart-villages-orientations-leader-lags_en

NEWS & UPDATES

Rural Inspiration Awards 2020

Building on the success of the 2019 ENRD Rural Inspiration Awards (RIA) and following consultation with stakeholders, the ENRD CP has launched a call for entries in the RIA 2020.

This year the focus will be on bioeconomy and climate action, topics related also to a current ENRD Thematic Group working to identify good practices in these areas.

A jury of experts will select the winning projects among those submitted by National Rural Network (NRN) Support Units who have proposed the entries for their Member State.

Meanwhile, the latest edition of the EAFRD Projects Brochure celebrates the finalists of the Rural Inspiration Awards 2019.

**i FOR FURTHER INFORMATION**

https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/news/rural-inspiration-awards-2020_en
EAFRD Projects Brochure 'Rural Inspiration Awards 2019':
https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/publications/eafrd-projects-brochure-rural-inspiration-awards-2019_en

Bioeconomy and climate action

In autumn 2019 the ENRD launched a Thematic Group (TG) on 'Bioeconomy and climate action' which will focus on ways to mitigate climate change through bio-based activities and on tools within the current RDPs that can be used to support this purpose.

Do you know about EAFRD-funded rural bioeconomy initiatives that contribute to fighting climate change, and/or invest in applying and scaling up related innovation in rural areas? Let us know! Send your ideas to bioeconomy@enrd.eu – selected cases may be presented in the activities of the ENRD TG, including events, publications and a video.

i FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

ENRD thematic work:
https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/enrd-thematic-work/greening-rural-economy/bioeconomy_en
EAFRD Projects Brochure 'Bioeconomy'
https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/publications/eafrd-projects-brochure-bioeconomy_en
EU Rural Review 28 'Mainstreaming the bioeconomy'
https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/publications/eu-rural-review-28-bioeconomy_en



NEWS & UPDATES

Social inclusion

The ENRD is looking at different ways to make rural areas more vibrant and inclusive. Two events have been organised so far: a first workshop



European Union, 2020

‘Combatting rural depopulation: Creating new opportunities for vibrant rural areas’ was held in Brussels, Belgium on 21 May 2019. It explored the role of the Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) and other EU policies in countering the trend of rural depopulation facing many of Europe’s rural areas. Participants had the chance to learn from national and local initiatives and to share lessons on addressing population

decline in rural areas. A second ENRD workshop on ‘Vibrant rural areas: rural jobs’ (27 November 2019) looked at employment opportunities in rural areas and related support mechanisms, taking into account the wider rural perspective and different aspects of rural employment. A third workshop is planned in early summer 2020 and a new EAFRD Projects Brochure on ‘Vibrant rural areas’ is in the making.

 FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

ENRD Workshop ‘Combatting Rural Depopulation: Creating new opportunities for vibrant rural areas’ https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/enrd-workshop-combatting-rural-depopulation-creating-new-opportunities-vibrant_en

ENRD Workshop ‘Vibrant Rural Areas: Rural Jobs’ https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/enrd-workshop-vibrant-rural-areas-rural-jobs_en

Smart Villages

The ENRD thematic work on Smart Villages is continuing for a third year. Its aim is to turn the considerable momentum that has been created around this concept into concrete proposals for designing support for Smart Villages in the future programming period.

The dedicated ENRD Thematic Group (TG) is organising a series of ‘clinics’ - meetings allowing Member States to work together on designing the building blocks for Smart Village Strategies in a specific geographical or thematic context.

Based on these meetings, the TG is producing a series of thematic briefings on the ideas for supporting Smart Villages in the CAP Strategic Plans in certain Member States (such as Finland and Poland), as well as in certain key fields such as digitalisation, renewable energy communities and rural mobility. These aim to help rural stakeholders assess whether the conditions are in place for successful Smart Village initiatives in their country, and to support Managing Authorities in the design and implementation of appropriate support tools, in particular within the future CAP Strategic Plans.

These outcomes will feed into the existing Smart Villages Portal and toolkit.



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 FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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

Smart Villages briefing ‘Rural mobility’: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/enrd/files/enrd_publications/smart-villages_brief_rural-mobility.pdf

Smart Villages in Finland: ideas for designing support in the future CAP Strategic Plans: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/publications/smart-villages-finland-ideas-designing-support-future-cap-strategic-plans_en

NEWS & UPDATES

15th and 16th NRN Meetings

The last two meetings of the National Rural Networks (NRNs) launched an ongoing discussion about the organisation of the future CAP Networks.

The 15th NRN meeting – co-organised with the Réseau Rural Français – took place in Poitiers, France in September 2019. It brought together participants from 22 Member States, representing 23 National Rural Networks, with many French regional networks also attending. The meeting explored ways of improving territorial cooperation and consulting with stakeholders. It was combined with the meeting of

the French Regional Networks taking place the next day, which focused on the development of the post 2020 CAP Networks at EU and national level. There was also a visit to an EAFRD-funded project focusing on redeveloping a rural French village by providing a restaurant and accommodation.

The 16th NRN meeting – co-organised with the Spanish Rural Network – took place in Calatayud, Spain in March 2020. The meeting focused on the state of play of preparations for the design and setting up of the new CAP Networks particularly at national level, as well

as exchanging on any challenges and potential solutions. The participants also took part in a workshop on facilitation techniques for stakeholder engagement, designed to support National Support Units to fulfil their tasks related to the NRN objective of ‘more involved stakeholders’.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/15th-nrn-meeting_en

https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/16th-nrn-meeting_en

Governance update

The main governance bodies of the ENRD and EIP-AGRI networks, the Rural Networks’ Assembly and its Steering Group, have continued to guide their existing work and plan the future.

The 12th meeting of the Steering Group, held on 21 October 2019, helped provide strategic direction, gave feedback on outcomes from the 2019 Rural Networks’ self-assessment exercise, considered the governance of the future CAP network and provided an update on planned and forthcoming rural networks’ activities.

Reflections from this meeting were presented at the 6th Rural Networks’ Assembly which took place on 16 December 2019 in Brussels

The Rural Networks’ Assembly Sub-group on LEADER/CLLD gathered in Brussels on 4 February 2020 to update on the state of play of the CAP reform proposals for LEADER, and to discuss key success factors ensuring that LEADER delivers in a performance framework under the future CAP Strategic Plans. Current LEADER achievements were presented by various Member States and they demonstrated how they will be incorporated into their planning for the next programming period.



European Union, 2020

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/about/european-rural-networks-governance/european-rural-networks-assembly/leader-clld-sub-group_en

NEWS & UPDATES

ENRD Contact Point team changes

John Grieve has taken over as Team Leader replacing Michael Gregory who bid the Contact Point farewell after ten years. A former farmer and LEADER LAG manager, John was previously Deputy Team Leader of the CP and has more than 30 years of experience in rural development.

Five new colleagues have joined the Contact Point team. **Réjane Dufrasnes**⁽¹⁾ joins the Management & Horizontal Coordination team as Project Officer; **Susan Grieve**⁽²⁾ joins the Exchange & Cooperation team as Policy Analyst; the Knowledge Sharing team welcomes **Sandrine Duquenoy**⁽³⁾, Website Specialist;

Tim Hudson⁽⁴⁾, Multimedia Expert and **Monica Sonia**⁽⁵⁾, Communication Expert. **Cristina Rascón García**⁽⁶⁾ joins the Knowledge Development team as Project Officer. The Contact Point wishes all the best to Carlos de la Paz and Roxana Vilcu, who left the team in 2019 for new professional experiences.


 FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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

A note from Mike Gregory, ENRD Contact Point, 2008-2019

Having been a part of the ENRD landscape for over a decade, it was a big personal decision to leave the Contact Point last summer. The ENRD has been a massive part of my life and I owe a great deal to all the professional and enthusiastic networkers who have made the network the success it is today and such a rewarding environment to work in. On a personal basis, I have learned so much about the positive value of networking and also about myself along the way.

That EU rural development policy networking has become a great success is not in question, as was demonstrated to such effect at the networX event last year. Now I am looking forward to seeing the network(s) successfully evolve to support and strengthen the whole of the CAP in future years. I am convinced that success can be found through the same openness of attitude, a culture of listening to others and an understanding

that policy operates best when 'joined-up' thinking prevails.

The new challenge I have embarked on is to support the economic, social and environmental development of the Aseer region of Saudi Arabia. Yes, it's a big change, but I know that the

same principles underpinning success will apply. And to all the friends and colleagues who have wished me luck in 'my pastures new' – rest assured I will keep you posted.

All the best to you all
Mike



NEWS & UPDATES

UPDATE FROM THE EVALUATION HELPDESK

EUROPEAN
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FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Supporting the Ex-ante Evaluation Post-2020



© Jela Tyrdonova

Member States are currently preparing for the CAP Strategic Plans for post-2020. The legal proposal on support for CAP Strategic Plans has been published on 1 June 2018 and marks a shift from a compliance-oriented approach to a performance-based approach. This requires the establishment of a solid Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (PMEF) which will allow the European Commission and the Member States to assess and monitor the performance of the policy in the next programming period.

In view of this, the Evaluation Helpdesk is conducting a variety of activities aiming at taking stock of lessons learned from the current programming period in order to be better prepared for the next and support Member States in these actions.

The Evaluation Helpdesk has conducted three Good Practice Workshops: 'Getting prepared for the ex-ante evaluation of the CAP Strategic Plan' in Brussels, Belgium, 'Appraising intervention strategies under the CAP: experiences and outlook' in Rome, Italy, and 'How to demonstrate RDP achievements and impacts: lessons learned from the evaluations reported in the AIR 2019' in Seville, Spain. These workshops provided a forum to discuss and learn from past experiences, exchange on key principles and identify challenges and

needs while developing suggestions to help Managing Authorities and evaluators in their ex-ante evaluation activities.

The EvaluationWORKS! 2019 Yearly Capacity Building Events, which have been conducted in the Member States, covered the topic, 'From the AIR in 2019 to the ex-ante evaluation of the CAP Strategic Plan'. This topic was divided into sub-topics, which Member States could choose:

- Discussion on the quality of the evaluations for the AIR submitted in June 2019;
- Discussion on follow-up of evaluations for the AIR in 2019 (for ex-ante, ex post, Evaluation Plan);

- General information on the requirements and planning of the ex-ante (legal basis, timing, ToR, quality criteria);
- Ex-ante appraisal of SWOT/Needs Assessment; and,
- Ex-ante appraisal of intervention logic, targets, and milestones.

These events were carried out in the local languages by the Helpdesk's network of Geographic Experts and were adapted to meet the needs of each Member State.

GUIDANCE FOR THE FUTURE!

The Evaluation Helpdesk's Thematic Working Group 7 'Preparing for the ex-ante evaluation of the CAP Strategic Plan', has been structured along the process of a typical ex-ante evaluation, which can play a crucial role in improving the CAP Strategic Plan and the basis for the evaluation cycle. Each working package focuses on the development of practical tools that aim to support Managing Authorities and evaluators at each step of the ex-ante evaluation process.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Good Practice Workshop 'Getting prepared for the ex-ante evaluation of the CAP Strategic Plan' in Brussels, Belgium: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/evaluation/good-practice-workshops/getting-prepared-ex-ante-evaluation-cap-strategic-plan_en

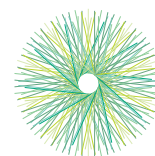
Good Practice Workshop 'Appraising intervention strategies under the CAP: experiences and outlook': https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/evaluation/good-practice-workshops/appraising-intervention-strategies-under-cap-experiences-and_en

Good Practice Workshop 'How to demonstrate RDP achievements and impacts: lessons learned from the evaluations reported in the AIR 2019': https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/evaluation/good-practice-workshops/how-demonstrate-rdp-achievements-and-impacts-lessons-learned_en

EvaluationWORKS! 2019: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/evaluation/capacity-building-activities/evaluationworks-2019_en

Thematic Working Group 7: 'Preparing for the ex-ante evaluation of the CAP Strategic Plan': https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/evaluation/thematic-working-groups/thematic-working-group-7-preparing-ex-ante-evaluation-cap_en

NEWS & UPDATES

UPDATE FROM EIP-AGRI

eip-agri
AGRICULTURE & INNOVATION

Digital farming at the heart of the EIP-AGRI network



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In April 2019, 25 European countries signed a Declaration of cooperation for 'A smart and sustainable digital future for European agriculture and rural areas'. With this, they agreed to take a number of actions to support a successful digitalisation of agriculture and rural areas in Europe. The EIP-AGRI is keen to support its network members in the digital transformation, which can help them tackle the economic, social, climate and environmental challenges they are facing.

STRATEGY SUPPORT FOR DECISION MAKERS

The short report from the EIP-AGRI seminar 'Multi-level strategies for digitising agriculture and rural areas' offers Managing Authorities, National Rural Networks and other decision makers 12 ideas to build effective digital strategies, eight challenges to consider when developing these strategies and eight priority actions to help move strategies forward. This short report is the result of the discussions between 143 seminar participants from 25 countries.

TOOLS FOR SMALL FARMS

At the end of October 2019, the EIP-AGRI Service Point invited farmers, researchers and EIP-AGRI Operational Groups to the workshop 'Small is smart', to find out how small farms across Europe can benefit more from innovation or new technologies. The workshop helped participants to learn more about each other, find common issues and explore possibilities for collaboration and knowledge exchange.

IDENTIFICATION OF NEW SKILLS

Digitalisation will play an important role in the future CAP, with a strong emphasis on sharing knowledge, fostering

digitalisation and encouraging its uptake in agriculture and rural areas. The EIP-AGRI seminar 'New skills for digital farming' (February 2020) focused on exactly that. Participants discussed the skills that can help farmers better understand and use digital technologies and shared successful educational and training initiatives that can raise awareness and foster digital skills in the farming community. The seminar provided a chance to discuss how the CAP strategic plans can address the digital skills gap in the farming sector and explored ways to connect European actors in the farming, advisory, educational and vocational training sectors to develop a strong support system for knowledge exchange and innovation in agriculture.

DIGITAL AGRICULTURE AT A GLANCE

Agriculture and forestry innovators who have not participated in any previous EIP-AGRI activities can also benefit from the results by looking at the 'digital agriculture' section on the EIP-AGRI website.

i FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Short report on multi-level strategies: https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/sites/agri-eip/files/eip-agri_sem_digitising_agriculture_and_rural_areas_short_report_2019_en.pdf

EIP-AGRI workshop 'Small is smart': <https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/en/event/eip-agri-workshop-small-smart-innovative-solutions>

EIP-AGRI seminar 'New skills for digital farming': <https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/en/event/eip-agri-seminar-new-skills-digital-farming>

EIP-AGRI section 'Digital agriculture': <https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/en/digitising-agriculture>

NEWS & UPDATES

EU NEWS

New European Commission

The new European Commission led by President Ursula **von der Leyen** took up office on 1 December 2019. In the political guidelines for the new Commission⁽¹⁾, President von der Leyen highlighted her aims for the new mandate, including a new Green Deal which sets out how to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050.

The European Green Deal, presented on 11 December 2019, is a new growth strategy that aims to transform the EU into a fair and prosperous society, with a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy where there are no net emissions of greenhouse gases in 2050 and where economic growth is decoupled from resource use.⁽²⁾

The Farm to Fork' strategy is one of the key actions included in the Roadmap to the European Green Deal. The strategy will increase the level of ambition to significantly reduce the use and risk of chemical pesticides, as well as the use of fertilisers and antibiotics. The Commission will identify the measures needed to bring about these reductions based on a stakeholder dialogue.⁽³⁾

President von der Leyen said European rural areas are "a core part of our identity and our economic potential. We will cherish and preserve our rural areas and invest in their future." She also said her Commission will develop a "long-term vision for rural areas to enable them to

make the most of their potential and support them in facing up to their own unique set of issues, from demographic change to connectivity, the risk of poverty

and limited access to services. This should be done in close consultation with people living in rural areas, as well as local and regional authorities."



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i FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

'A Union that strives for more': https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/political-guidelines-next-commission_en.pdf
Mission letter to Dubravka Šuica, Vice-President-designate for Democracy and Demography:
https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/mission-letter-dubravka-suica_en.pdf

(1) https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/political-guidelines-next-commission_en.pdf

(2) https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/communication-european-green-deal_en

(3) https://ec.europa.eu/food/farm2fork_en

NEWS & UPDATES

New Commissioner for Agriculture

The new Commissioner for Agriculture is Janusz Wojciechowski from Poland.

Mr Wojciechowski was previously a member of the European Parliament from 2004 until 2016. During that time, he served as a Vice-Chair of the European Parliament's Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development.

His time in the European Parliament came to an end in 2016 when he decided to take up a position in the European Court of Auditors.

President von der Leyen has tasked Mr Wojciechowski with developing the new long-term vision for rural areas (working closely with the Commissioner responsible for Cohesion and Reforms and under the coordination of the Vice President for Democracy and Demography) and ensuring that the needs of rural areas are specifically catered for in national Strategic Plans under the new Common Agricultural Policy. His other tasks include swiftly concluding the negotiations on a modern and simplified CAP post 2020, contributing to the new 'Farm to Fork' strategy for sustainable food and promoting Europe's high-quality food standards worldwide.



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i FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Read Commissioner Wojciechowski's mission letter:
https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/sites/comm-cwt2019/files/commissioner_mission_letters/mission-letter-janusz-wojciechowski_en.pdf

Chair of European Parliament's Agriculture and Rural Development Committee

The new Chair of the European Parliament's Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development (COMAGRI) is Norbert Lins from Germany, who has been a Member of the European Parliament since 2014 and a member of COMAGRI since 2017. Mr Lins is a member of the Group of the European People's Party.

COMAGRI is an important player in the shaping of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), as well as policies in the fields of animal health and welfare, plant health, agricultural products quality,

forestry and agroforestry of the Union. Most of this work is done through preparation of reports for legislative proposals, falling under the co-decision procedure between Parliament and the Council, for adoption in plenary.

Other EP Committees also feed their views into the work on the CAP, including the Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) and the Committee on Regional Development (REGI).

RURAL ISSUES, RURAL PERSPECTIVES

Societies outside the metropolises

Assya Kavrakova

A field research study in four European countries explored the causes of populism and the role of civil society in countering the populist trend, particularly in rural areas.



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Populism is a very complex and multifaceted phenomenon, manifested at global, European, national and regional level. There are intense disputes between political science experts and within the public at large on its causes and effects, common features and specificities, and debates over the necessary approaches to address the root causes and adverse ramifications.

ECAS was recently commissioned to conduct field research in rural areas in four EU countries (Austria, France, Italy and Poland) by the European Economic and Social Committee's Diversity Europe Group. The crucial questions behind this research were: what are the factors behind the rise of populism and what role can civil society organisations (CSOs) play to counter populism?

The first answer, in a nutshell, is: no single factor alone causes populism – there is an interplay of factors, which feed on and reinforce each other.

For middle-income groups, for example, the fear of loss of status is the strongest driving factor towards populist parties, while in lower income groups the key factor is the more direct fear of loss of jobs and income.

Similarly, the rejection of migration can be due to cultural factors, but also to fear of job losses or job competition.

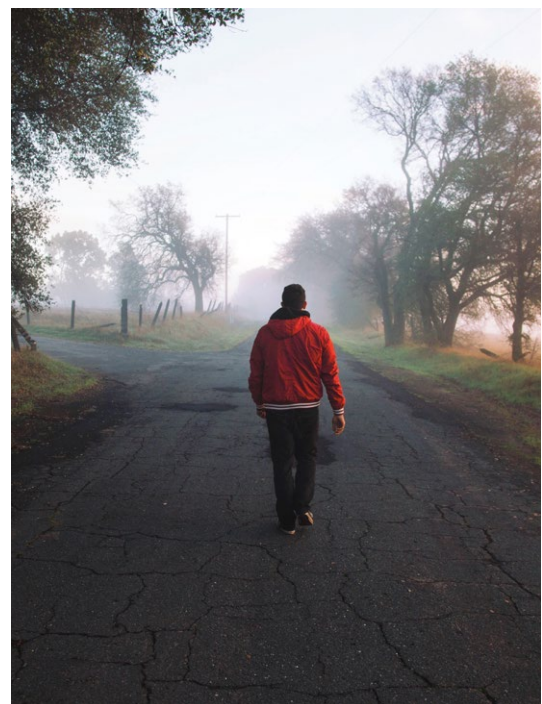
'Anxieties' and 'fears' were often invoked by CSO activists and political science experts interviewed, as populists' main tactic is the manipulation of popular fears. For example 'cultural insecurity' explains why such political forces are getting stronger in countries where the economic situation is in fact quite good.

Geography matters. Citizens' attitudes towards the EU, migration, and authoritarian tendencies vary between countries, as well as between the different regions within the same country. In some cases, a city-countryside divide emerged clearly.

In France, for instance, rural, peripheral areas feel further and further away from the decision-making arenas, as well as from the big public or private services. This creates a 'cocktail of resentment' that easily feeds populist rhetoric.

In Austria, the research highlighted that the collapse of structures for debates around social issues and social bonds in local communities, in combination with the passivity of the traditional political parties in reaching out to rural areas, creates feelings of abandonment and disconnection among citizens. This situation is exploited by populists. The restoration of the public sphere and the civic space is one way to shrink the space for populism.

Here we come to the answer to the second question – the role of civil society organisations.



CSOs can play an important role in raising awareness of the populist phenomenon in their regions and devising effective strategies to address its roots and manifestations. They can give voice to and advocate for those who are under-represented or in an underprivileged position, and lead the development of a

public sphere for debate at local level. They can effectively promote European values as well.

Some CSOs involved in the research pointed out difficulties in establishing and running activities in rural areas, which contributes even more to the distancing of rural citizens. This was particularly clear in the case of Poland, where civil society organisations in rural areas offer very limited employment opportunities and much lower income levels as compared to CSOs in urban centres. Thus, one key recommendation from the study is to invest more in CSOs in rural areas, better supporting their human resources, communication skills and knowledge base.

Another recommendation is to develop better structures for citizens' deliberation and more direct democracy mechanisms. These should be based on robust debate with clear questions and outcomes, a well-informed public and long-nurtured culture of direct democracy. This is particularly important to develop what an expert called 'democracy of proximity' – direct democracy mechanisms at local level that build on the proximity between authorities and people.

The study also recommends improving EU communications, especially in rural areas, to better inform citizens about the EU's achievements and funding opportunities. There is a need for bridging the perceived gap between the centre and the periphery, one of the key arguments used by populists and to thus reduce negative attitudes towards the EU.



Societies outside Metropolises: the role of civil society organisations in facing populism

STUDY



European Economic and Social Committee

i FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

<https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/publications-other-work/publications/societies-outside-metropolises-role-civil-society-organisations-facing-populism-study>

Right-wing populism and emancipatory rural politics in the European countryside

Natalia Mamonova

An academic and activist's opinion on the rise of populism in the European countryside and the possibilities offered by emancipatory rural politics.



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To resist right-wing populism, it is necessary to understand its causes.

The economic and cultural crises that hit Europe during the last decades have exacerbated economic inequality and social deprivation. At the same time, globalisation, multiculturalism and mass migration flows have fed the fear of losing cultural identity. However, economic arguments alone do not explain why in Portugal – among the countries that were hit hardest by the financial crisis – the far right remains only marginal. Meanwhile, Poland – one of the fastest growing economies in Europe – has witnessed a surge in right-wing populism.

The rise of populism comes from a combination of social, economic and cultural factors, which, in some Member States, are more strongly felt in rural areas. The European agricultural workforce has been declining steadily in the last years and is expected to continue its downward trend⁽¹⁾. Beyond the agricultural sector, economic and infrastructural decline nurtured rural residents' feeling of being 'left behind'. On the other hand, politics presented neoliberal globalisation as the only option, while rural issues were largely overlooked in the political debate.

Thus, what has to be done? Cosmetic changes will not have a long-lasting effect: we need to rethink the entire system. We need a radical transformation of power relations.

The Emancipatory Rural Politics Initiative (ERPI) is a scholar-activist community that aims at understanding the rise of right-wing populism in the rural world, the forms of resistance occurring, and the alternatives being



built. We believe that top-down initiatives are unable to resolve the political crisis: resistance and alternatives should come from below. Our European team includes researchers, rural activists, representatives of NGOs and social movements who work together to build the ERPI network in Europe and find sustainable solutions to the populist surge in our rural areas.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

<https://www.iss.nl/en/research/hosted-iss/emancipatory-rural-politics-initiative>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/235539647275100/>

N. Mamonova, J. Franquesa, 'Populism, neoliberalism and agrarian movements in rural Europe. Understanding rural support for right-wing politics and looking for progressive solutions', in *Sociologia Ruralis*, November 2019: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/soru.12291>

(1) https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/food-farming-fisheries/key_policies/documents/soc_background_final_en.pdf

RURAL ISSUES, RURAL PERSPECTIVES

Rural depopulation: stemming the tide

Roxana Vilcu

Population decline is putting pressure on large numbers of rural territories and hindering their ability to adapt and respond to emerging challenges. Rural Development policy provides Member States with an array of measures to face these issues.



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About 28% of the EU population lives in the least densely populated rural areas furthest from cities, while a further 31.6% live in intermediate areas which also include many rural areas. The remaining 40.4% live in cities⁽¹⁾. On the surface, there is a seemingly unstoppable worldwide trend towards urbanisation and by 2050, the EU population living in cities is expected to grow by 24.1 million, while the population in predominantly rural areas is expected to shrink by 7.9 million⁽²⁾. Many rural areas seem to be locked into a 'circle of decline' by two mutually reinforcing trends: a shortage of sustainable business activity and inadequate and declining services.

However, population decline is far from being a universal characteristic of rural areas and it is far from inevitable. In fact, the problem is concentrated in the far North of Europe, in the central parts of the Southern and Mediterranean countries and the Central and South Eastern countries undergoing major agricultural restructuring. Rural shrinkage is more prevalent in the EU-13 of central and eastern Europe with circa 60% of regions experiencing depopulation while, in the EU-15 of western Europe, just over 35% of predominantly rural regions are shrinking.⁽³⁾

Policy-makers at all levels and local communities in affected areas are looking for approaches that can stem the depletion of rural populations and are increasingly adapting policies through integrated approaches and strategies. In this context, a new vision of rural areas is emerging, based on their potentially key role in the transition towards a greener, circular, digital and more caring society.

In May 2019, the ENRD brought together policy-makers and stakeholders from regional, national and European levels to discuss and form an overview the effects of rural depopulation and consider how to respond to them through various initiatives and projects.

The ENRD workshop 'Combating rural depopulation: Creating new opportunities for vibrant rural areas' discussed, examples of national strategies, regional approaches and local initiatives to revitalise rural areas across Europe. Two success factors were highlighted throughout the meeting: a strong political commitment to achieve the successful implementation of strategies; and the continuous involvement of local communities and local actors.



© Unsplash, Alexandru G. Stavrică

- (1) Eurostat, Statistics on rural areas in the EU, data from February 2017, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Statistics_on_rural_areas_in_the_EU
 (2) ESPON Policy Brief 'Shrinking rural regions in Europe', October 2017, www.espon.eu/rural-shrinking
 (3) Source: ESPON (cit.).



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The project examples discussed in the workshop also showed there is a need to improve co-ordination and synergies between funds at all levels (including via multi-finding of CLLD), and these issues should be addressed in an integrated way.

In this context, the upcoming CAP Strategic Plans represent an opportunity for Member States to design specific interventions to tackle the depopulation of rural areas. Any strategic approach aiming to improve the quality of life in rural communities (such as, for example, Smart Villages) should focus on the people. These approaches need to rely on local actors, involving civil society in the decision-making process, making sure that local communities' needs are addressed and that interventions are appropriate for the territory.

It is time for more proactive and place-based strategies that address the needs of rural areas across Europe!

ENRD thematic work on Social Inclusion

As one of the ENRD's main thematic work strands, social inclusion links directly to Priority 6 of EU Rural Development policy on 'promoting social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas'. For more details about the ENRD activities on this topic, see the News section (page 6).

Further information:

- https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/enrd-thematic-work/social-inclusion_en
- https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/enrd-workshop-vibrant-rural-areas-rural-jobs_en

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

ENRD Workshop on 'Combating rural depopulation: Creating new opportunities for vibrant rural areas': https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/enrd-workshop-combatting-rural-depopulation-creating-new-opportunities-vibrant_en
Eurofound Policy Brief - 'Quality of life: Is rural Europe being left behind?': <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/policy-brief/2019/is-rural-europe-being-left-behind>
ESPON Policy Brief - 'Shrinking rural regions in Europe': <https://www.espon.eu/rural-shrinking>

RURAL ISSUES, RURAL PERSPECTIVES

The dark charm of the Swedish countryside

Ingrid Whitelock

Investigating the success of fictional rural murders in books and films set in the Swedish countryside.



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There has been a surge in the number of psychological thrillers, books, films and TV series featuring violent death and dark stories taking place in the Swedish countryside. The phenomenon is so popular that it has become a genre – ‘country noir’.

Our Landet (*‘Countryside’*) podcast series ‘How does the urban norm affect the perception of rural areas?’ looks at the role of rural people and areas as they are portrayed in popular culture, often based on urban norms. The ‘urban norm’ or ‘urban lens’ is a concept that points to power relations between the city, seen as a model for social development and highly valuable, and the countryside as its ‘other’, a place that is problematic and requires special solutions.

The podcasts are about the representation of rural areas in music, literature, film and television and how this affects the perception of rural areas as a place to live, work and create new business opportunities. As Swedish crime novels sell well in other countries, we chose to start our series with literature.

How come so many authors choose to write psychological thrillers about unsolved murders taking place in the countryside, when statistics show that most crimes are committed in major cities? Anna Bågstad, whose book ‘The Eyewitness’ takes place in a small fishing camp in the south of Sweden, explained: “In the countryside there are the components needed to build an exciting story. A limited number of people, places that can feel desolate and elements of nature that can be scary. It also gives a nasty contrast when something terrible happens in a place that is very idyllic.”

Despite the rural background, the country noir genre often shows traces of the urban norm, said writer

Camilla Sten. She lives and works in Stockholm but has set her psychological thriller ‘The City’ in a small abandoned town in northern Sweden.





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“Generally, in fiction, the actual murder/crime is committed in the countryside, but the police, investigators and journalists come almost always from the big city to lead, solve and depict the whole thing. In addition, many writers come from Stockholm and Gothenburg and do not know how rural life feels from the inside, so they automatically use an urban norm in the books.”

Hopefully, however, the great interest in country noir and rural murders will not deter people from visiting, living and running businesses in the Swedish countryside – rather the opposite. Our latest podcast is on place-branding, which is about making one’s countryside known to a large circle of people, such as readers, to increase tourism and attract more residents, investments and businesses. In Sweden, it is already very popular to arrange guided walks in

areas where fictional crimes and dramas have taken place. And surely people can differentiate between fantasy and reality.

The next podcasts will look at how place-branding can take rural areas to a whole new level. Stay tuned!

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

The podcast ‘Landet’ is one of the many channels that the Swedish Rural Network uses to interact and communicate with users and members. It has an average of 1 800 listeners per month. The most successful series so far have been those on climate, urban norms, food supply and smart villages. Over 100 episodes have been broadcast so far.

http://www.landsbygdsnatverket.se/inspiration/poddenlandet.106.41f1e6161646f3ceb1be490e.html?query=%3A*&submitButton=5%C3%B6k

RURAL ISSUES, RURAL PERSPECTIVES

Rural Dialogues

Oliver Moore

Rural areas in Europe offer both interesting opportunities and inspiring pathways towards a just transition.



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The Agricultural and Rural Convention – ARC2020 – is a multi-stakeholder platform which enables people's voices to be heard on important topics for farming, food and rural actors. Individuals, such as farmers or journalists, or people from different institutions or organisations, from academics to policy officers or activists, share their views through articles or debates focused on specific topics.

The Rural Dialogues article series, published on ARC2020's website in 2019, has been one of our most popular so far, with over a dozen contributions. Given the sometimes negative coverage of rural areas in traditional media, it was heartening to hear about some interesting and inspiring initiatives from all over the continent.

The social and solidarity economy in rural areas has the potential to offer alternatives in these times of deep transition.

Eamon O'Hara of Ecolise (the European network for community-led initiatives on climate change and sustainability) wrote about the power of



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community-led rural initiatives across Europe to face the challenges of climate and biodiversity breakdown. "There are (...) an estimated 2 500 community energy initiatives, 1 500 Slow Food communities (focused on preserving traditional and regional cuisine and encouraging the farming of plants, seeds, and livestock characteristic of local ecosystems) and about 7 000 community-supported agriculture schemes feeding over a million citizens."



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The Landcare movement brings together a range of rural stakeholders to carefully plan land practices. Bavaria, Germany leads the way in Europe, with up to 80% of land structured in this way. The ARC2020 #RuralDialogues initiative gathered all sorts of environment and rural development stakeholders to discuss this in Cloughjordan. This Irish ecovillage is a 67-acre site where the community shares land, infrastructure, a farm, heating system and more.

An article by the ENRD Contact Point's Paul Soto and Enrique Nieto delved deeper into the Smart Villages idea, unpacking the opportunities and the barriers to their emergence. Sylvia Kay (TNI - Transnational Institute, an international research and advocacy institute committed to building a just, democratic and sustainable planet) told us of the development of agroecology in the Netherlands. María Coto Sauras (consultant at Red2Red, working on public policy, sustainability and rural affairs)

revealed how thoughtful planning can support immigrant families to settle in Spanish rural areas, seizing opportunities while bringing solutions to local needs.

The Rural Dialogues series brought to light many more topics, with an overarching theme: the benefits of working together. When people come together and really listen to each other, in their own small way they change the world for the better.

 FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

<http://www.arc2020.eu>

RURAL ISSUES, RURAL PERSPECTIVES

Networks: a sociologist's view

Dr Áine Macken-Walsh

In the context of ambitions for growth in networking under the CAP post-2020, a social scientist looks at opportunities for policy-makers and practitioners.



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Why have networks become so prominent as agencies for public engagement, change and innovation?

EU networks have multiple goals. Partnership-based approaches (e.g. LEADER) were originally acknowledged to be capable of creating solutions to problems beyond the capabilities of one actor/sector acting alone. Furthermore, multi-actor partnerships synergise different knowledges, capacities, resources and perspectives in relation to the same problem, producing novel and implementable (innovative) solutions. Extending opportunities for further participation in such innovation, formal networks within and across Member States are built to reach different social groups on the ground.

Networks also have distinctive ways of working: they engage, animate and involve grassroots actors rather than taking a regulatory approach. Understood through a lens of social science, engagement strategies are preferred because regulatory approaches are ineffective when it comes to promoting development and innovation. "It is much more efficient to govern through freedoms... than repressions... [programmes that] allow for diversities and pluralities in social integration are more resilient and robust."⁽¹⁾ But, for such 'governance through freedoms' to be effective, networks must be perceived as legitimate, attractive and engaging for people on the ground.

As was highlighted at the ENRD networkX event⁽²⁾, networks are made of people, not institutions. Consistent with this view, social science identifies social interactions as the building blocks of networks.

A network:

- has **norms and values**, influenced not only by policy makers but by implementers/participants on the ground;
- has **symbols** (languages, behaviours/actions) that are powerful social communicators of the network's identity, function/s, etc.;
- is **dynamic** (and therefore can change and grow) – but for this, its **norms, values and symbols** must evolve/change.

All organisations – including networks – have defined goals and ways of working at any point in time, until an actor (or, more effectively, a group of actors), acts (often deliberately) to change them. "Organisations [by definition] are the mobilisation of bias."⁽³⁾

EVOLVING AND GROWING NETWORKS

A basic principle for networks to evolve and grow (by changing their norms, values and symbols) in such a way that responds better and adaptively to wider actors on the ground is *reflexivity*. Social science explains reflexivity as a way of reflecting or thinking, "In a way that turns back upon, and takes account of, itself"⁽⁴⁾. In supporting Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI)⁽⁵⁾, reflexivity is a fundamental success factor: "Einstein (...) was successful partly because he doggedly and constantly asked questions with seemingly obvious answers. Childlike, he asked Why? How? What? rather than accepting givens."⁽⁶⁾

Employing reflexivity systematically in an organisational or team context involves periodic reflection on the

(1) Clegg, S. (2014) Circuits of power/knowledge. *Journal of Political Power* 7:3 pp. 383-392. For a review, see Haugaard, M. (2011) *Rethinking Power*. Social Science Research network (SSRN) <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1913739>

(2) https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/enrd/files/networkx_leader_highlights.pdf

(3) Schattschneider, E. E. (1960) *The Semisovereign People: A Realist's View of Democracy in America*.

(4) Hardy et al. (2001) 'Reflexivity in social studies: a study of the production of the research subject.' *Human Relations*, 54, p. 3-32, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0018726701545001>

(5) <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/en/h2020-section/responsible-research-innovation>

(6) Bolton, G. and Delderfield, R. (2018) *Reflective Practice Writing and Professional Development*, Sage, https://us.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/90765_Ch1_Reflective_Practice_an_Introduction.pdf



© ENRD CP, 2019

composition of a network and the motivations/nature of its activities. It is important to note that all groups of actors and stakeholders should be encouraged to undertake such reflective practice to appraise not only their own network/s but also their potential roles in new networks. Reflexivity adopted at the organisational level promotes reflexivity at the level of the individual actor.

Multiple resources and tools are available to promote reflexivity. Recent Horizon 2020 projects⁽⁷⁾ AgriDemo, SKIN, CERERE and FAIRshare, for example, developed a simple tool to promote reflexivity and facilitate multi-actor approaches. Project partners started by asking a simple question: 'Why?', from their perspectives, should diverse actors/stakeholders want to become involved in the project?

Asking this simple question is intended to trigger a reflective process to enhance partners' awareness of other actors' perspectives and to challenge partners' possible assumptions/biases. Following the initial question 'Why?', the following reflective questions were asked:

- who? (should actually become involved);
- what? (should be the goals);
- how? (should participation be facilitated); and,
- when? (are the most advantageous occasions for all concerned).

Another example of a tool to enhance reflexivity is mapping the existing network (and future evolved network). Using tools such as Social Network Analysis, leaders of and participants in networks can factually identify who is involved in networks, the strength/weaknesses and types of relationships in the networks, and who is not involved. This provides an evidence-based approach to assessing the constituency of networks, a valuable tool when used to support reflexivity.

(7) https://agridemo-h2020.eu/docs/D1.8_Protocol_Multiactor_approach.pdf

RURAL ISSUES, RURAL PERSPECTIVES

Reinforcing cooperation through staff exchanges

Carlos De La Paz

The ENRD Contact Point has launched a structured exchange programme for NSU staff members. Our former colleague Carlos de la Paz has tested the programme.



Carlos De La Paz, Director-General for EU Funds, Junta de Andalucía (Spain) – former Policy Officer at the ENRD Contact Point info@enrd.eu

One of the main goals of the European Network for Rural Development is to foster cooperation between EAFRD stakeholders. This is achieved through activities that build trust, facilitate communication and prompt synergies and common initiatives.

One such activity is the structured exchange programme for National Network Support Units (NSUs) recently put in place by the ENRD Contact Point. Through this programme, two NSUs can send a staff member to work for a short period in each other's office.

The ENRD CP has already organised two test exchanges, respectively with the Finnish and Portuguese NSUs. In this framework I got to spend the last two weeks of June 2019 in Lisbon, Portugal, at the NSU's premises.

I had a chance to work hand in hand with the whole staff of the Portuguese NSU and to contribute actively to their day-to-day activities. These spanned from communications to network governance and stakeholder engagement, from project visits to good practice collection and promotion.

A staff exchange is a massive learning curve and brings great benefits to both organisations:

- it increases the understanding of the implementation of the EAFRD in other Member States;
- it fosters mutual learning through the exchange of knowledge and expertise; and,
- it builds trust, facilitating the flow of information among NSUs – whether at national or EU level as in my case – and leading to enhanced cooperation.

If you plan to participate in a staff exchange, these are useful tips:

- know what you want: define clearly your objectives for the exchange;
- pick the best NSU for your purposes: consider work



© Carlos De La Paz

programmes, structure, tools, staff and activities (you can find everything on the ENRD website);

- contact the possible host well in advance: introduce yourself – especially your skills and strengths – and explain how you can actively contribute to the NSU's work;
- honest communication is key: tell them your objectives, listen carefully to theirs, and build a common project. The exchange should be a win-win situation, otherwise it is no win at all; and,
- plan carefully: try not to leave anything to chance to make the most out of your stay.

The ENRD CP keeps fostering exchanges among NSUs members, also using online technologies. For more information on potential future exchanges, please contact David Lamb: david.lamb@enrd.eu.

i FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/enrd/files/nm15_exchange_lamb.pdf

Results Based Payment Schemes

James Moran

Extensive piloting of Results Based Payments Schemes (RBPS) for delivering agri-environment support in EU Member States in the last ten years has given interesting results.



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Results Based Payments Schemes (RBPS) in this article refer to agri-environment schemes where the project holder is paid directly for the environmental results achieved, rather than for the prescribed list of management actions which are expected to deliver the required result. The latter is the system of Management Based Payments Schemes (MBPS), which remains the prevailing approach across the EU.

RBPS were first introduced in agri-environment design in the early 1990s coinciding with the

introduction of mandatory agri-environment measures in the CAP. Early examples in the UK, the Netherlands and Germany focused on species rich grasslands/meadows, and birds in both arable and grassland areas. In general, RBPS have been tried where management actions are ineffective or the link between specific management actions and environmental outcomes is not clear. They have been applied as 'higher tier' agri-environment measures targeting specific geographic areas.

Picture 1:

RBPS typically vary in payment levels with increasing delivery of results. Quality is measured using results indicators acting as proxies for overall biodiversity or environment target(s). Result indicators may include positive indicator plants which correlate with overall plant diversity in a field.⁽¹⁾



(1) Adapted from C. Maher, J. Moran et al. (2018). 'Results-based Agri-environmental Payments General Guidance Handbook. Step-by-step guide to designing a results-based payments scheme: lessons from Ireland and Spain.' Report prepared for the European Commission, DG Environment, https://rbapseu.files.wordpress.com/2019/01/rbaps_gh01_general_guidance.pdf

Over the last 25 years, a range of approaches to RBPS design and implementation has emerged, from purely results-based to hybrid approaches. In a hybrid approach the results-based payments are combined with payments for complementary management actions. The hybrid approach is often used where substantial initial investment and restorative actions are required to bring the target area to a minimum state where the result is achievable, thus reducing the risks for the farmer.

The focus of results-based payments to date has been on contributing to biodiversity targets (e.g. grassland biodiversity and farmland birds). However, there is increasing interest in their use beyond biodiversity targets, particularly where there

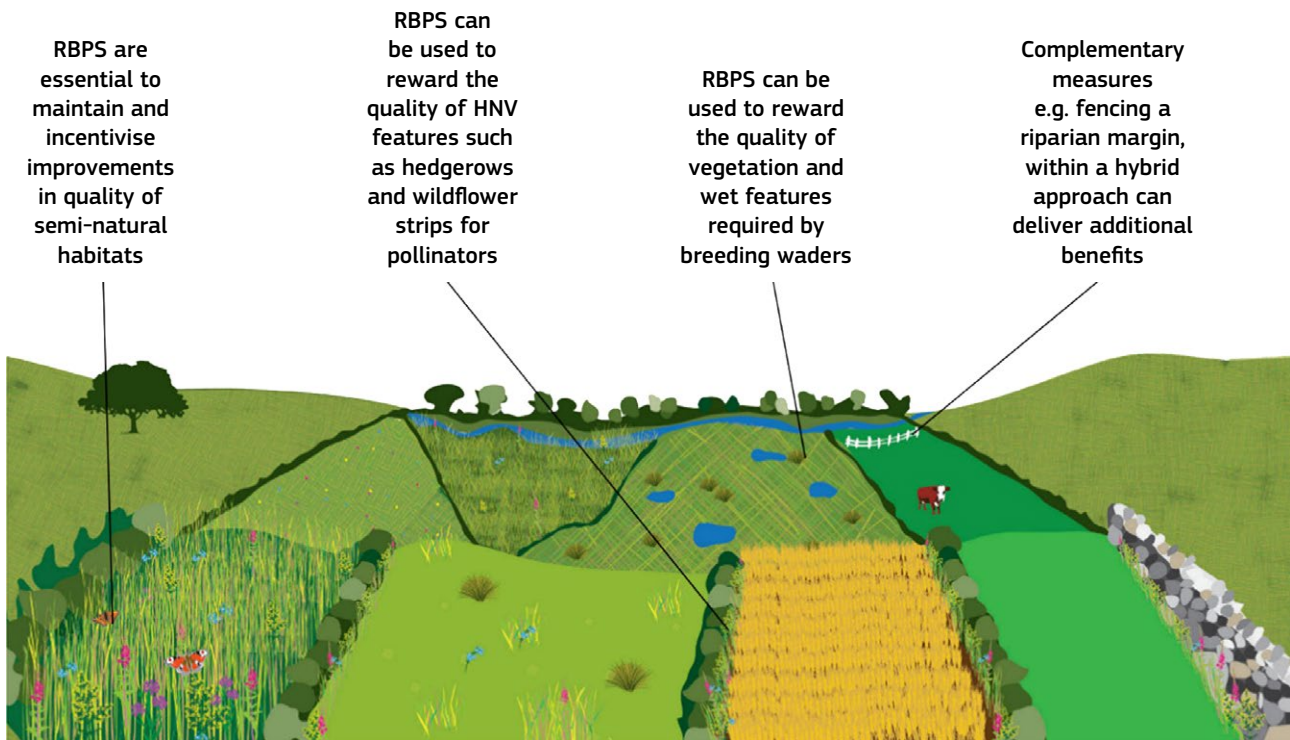
is a relationship between higher biodiversity quality and other environmental targets, e.g. water or landscape quality and carbon storage/sequestration.

A comparison of RBPS and MBPS (Table 1) highlights the potential for RBPS to be an important tool in well-designed, targeted and results oriented agri-environment measures. RBPS are often targeted at areas best placed, in terms of their land and farm system characteristics, to deliver specified results. With regards to biodiversity, most existing RBPS have been targeted at high nature value farmland areas (including Natura 2000 sites) and high nature value landscape features/field margins on intensive farmland.

Table 1:

Relative advantages/disadvantages of RBPS and MBPS approaches

Results-Based Payment Schemes	Management-Based Payment Schemes
Clear link between payments and delivery of results	Payments linked to actions expected to deliver results
Flexibility for participants to innovate and use skills and expertise to deliver results	Participants must follow prescribed actions
Simple farm contracts specifying results and payment levels	Depending on design, requires contracts with a detailed definition of management actions required for various targets
Facilitate easy targeting where participants are incentivised to select land where results are achievable	Degree of targeting depends on design of measure (lower tier broad scale approach or higher tier targeted approach)
Builds improved knowledge of environmental targets and capacity among participants	Level of knowledge and capacity building depends on design (higher vs lower tier)
Easier to meet requirements for enhanced verification by EU due to inbuilt monitoring of results	Additional monitoring required to verify that results have been achieved from prescribed actions
Higher administrative cost than lower tier Agri-environment-climate Measure (AECM) but similar to higher tier management-based approach	Administrative support depends on design, lower tier vs higher tier (i.e. level of targeting, number of actions available to farmers)
Managing authorities generally unfamiliar with approach so it requires an adaption of administrative systems	Management authorities familiar with approach and administrative system already set up
Requires specialist advisory support and training to ensure effectiveness	Requirements for specialist advisory support and training dependant on design i.e. higher versus lower tier
Higher level of risk for project holders if results are not achieved	Where prescribed actions, terms and conditions are adhered to there is no risk of loss of payment



The main advantages of RBPS over MPBS include clear links between payments and delivery of results. In many MBPS there has been little follow-up monitoring to verify if the desired results have actually been achieved from the prescribed actions. The flexibility in RBPS helps participants innovate and use their skills and expertise to deliver results. Another advantage is the combination with simple farm contracts specifying results and payment levels. Conversely, RBPS potentially carry higher risks for farmers when the results are not delivered despite work being undertaken. However, risks can be reduced with enhanced advisory support, training and knowledge sharing incorporated into scheme delivery. Good design can also ensure that the measurement of the results takes into account factors outside farmers' control.

There has been extensive piloting of RBPS in Member States over the last ten years including EU funded pilots in Ireland, Romania, Spain and the UK between 2015 and 2019. These pilots have demonstrated that the RBPS approach can be successfully applied across diverse agricultural settings, from floodplain meadows in Ireland, arable crops in the UK, permanent crops in Spain to extensive grasslands in Romania. These projects demonstrated that implementation and control can be simpler as compared to standard management-based approaches, but that capacity and resources are needed for effective design. Guidance and training through a farm advisory system is crucial during the implementation phase. This helps build capacity and contributes to the successful delivery of results. RBPS essentially create a market for environmental services/public goods integrating

environmental results into the farm production system. They can be viewed as a quality assurance element of agri-environment measures within the CAP.

In the EU pilots, farmers liked the principle that higher quality environmental products are rewarded with higher payments. They also highlighted how the approach made them more conscious of and positive towards environmental management. Above all they felt that well designed RBPS, locally adapted to their farm context, allowed them the flexibility to adjust their farming practices to the newly created environmental market. However, farmers do require clear signals of long-term commitments to this new approach.

Familiarity with the RBPS approach among Managing Authorities and the wider farming community remains a major barrier to their wider implementation. With the growth in RBPS across the EU there is a growing RBPS network willing to share their experience and knowledge with others. In a recent meeting in Austria, RBPS developers and managers came together and agreed to set up an RBPS network to facilitate knowledge sharing.

i FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

If you are interested in joining or learning more about this network please visit the network website:
<https://www.rbpnetwork.eu/our-network/>

RURAL ISSUES, RURAL PERSPECTIVES

Going up a level – together

Clare Taylor

A LIFE project uses a ground-breaking partnership to transform former agricultural land into nature.



Clare Taylor,
Communications
Coordinator,
NEEMO EEIG⁽¹⁾
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The Drents-Friese Wold National Park, situated on the border of the Dutch provinces of Friesland and Drenthe, covers around 6100 hectares of varied landscape, including shifting sands, heathlands, nutrient-poor grasslands and forests with dozens of fens. The national park is part of the European Natura 2000 network.

Located in the centre of the area is the former agricultural enclave of Oude Willem – almost 450 hectares – that a multi-stakeholder partnership is transforming into nature. Along with a group of nature restoration experts and practitioners from across Europe, I am here on a bright and brisk autumnal morning to learn first-hand about the trials and successes of the project so far.

“Moving away from intensive farming and towards nature is changing the daily lives of people in this community,” says Willem Urlings, a former local politician and the independent chair of the commission (Bestuurscommissie Oude Willem) overseeing two LIFE projects which exist in the area. “After decades of agricultural intensification and the associated loss of species and open habitats, we must now find a balance between the twin necessities of nature and food production.” Two farmers who are participating in the project nod in agreement.

Intensively farmed land, like Oude Willem, often has high levels of nutrients as a consequence of fertiliser use. The most problematic of these nutrients is phosphorous, and lowering the phosphorous level is one of the measures necessary to creating an environment in which indigenous plants and species can thrive. Another issue is the water level – the farmer requires a different water level to grow his crops than the water level needed for nature to flourish.



At Oude Willem, a technique ‘P-mining’ (or phytoextraction) is being tested at scale for the first time on over 200 hectares of intensively farmed land through the LIFE project ‘Going up a level!’.

The P-mining approach is to stimulate growth by fertilising the grass with potassium and nitrogen, mowing as much as possible (three times a year) and removing the cut material (for hay) to reduce the level of phosphate in the soil. The hay is used by farmers to feed their cattle in the winter.

(1) NEEMO is a consortium of organisations responsible for the monitoring of LIFE projects (LIFE Action grants) and of NGOs that receive funding from the LIFE Programme (LIFE Operational Grants): <https://neemo.eu/>



© p-Máttyás Prommer

Excavation can be a faster method of phosphate removal, but P-mining is a less disruptive approach. It usually involves partnerships with farmers.

At Oude Willem, the leased fields are mainly grass-clover (these were the most popular, particularly with organic farmers) and grasslands for production. Agreements with the farm tenants determine the way in which P-mining should be carried out. Based on the results of soil analyses, the project team provides guidance to farmers on fertilisation levels (using nitrogen and potassium) for each field.

Anja de Vries, from the Fryslân province – a project partner – explains: “Our aim was twofold: to develop a practical method for the removal of phosphate, with the involvement of farmers, and secondly, to increase knowledge about P-mining and share this with nature management organisations, farmers and other stakeholders.”

Many Natura 2000 sites include farmland. Restoration measures on this land can help ensure that the species and habitats targeted for conservation can recover. “In fifteen years’ time, Oude Willem will be a nature area,” says Hans Dekker, ecologist at the Province of Drenthe administration. However, according to project estimates, it may take up to 44 years for the phosphate levels to drop to a level that is suitable for a wildflower meadow.

Project partners include the local municipalities alongside the nature conservation organisation Natuurmonumenten and state forest management body Staatsbosbeheer, both of which began buying up parcels of land in the area as early as the 1960s.

Another key partner is the local water board (Waterschap Drents Overijsselse Delta). In fact, “The catalysing force behind this project was not biodiversity, but water management”, explains Professor Rudy van Diggelen (University of Antwerp). Flooding in the late 1990s led to a new approach to water management – filling in canals and instead allowing water to seep through the land and form small streams, slowing the flow rate considerably.

These types of nature-based solutions are likely to gather momentum during the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration from 2021 to 2030. And with the European Commission’s ambition for the new Green Deal, there are signs that nature restoration is moving up the political agenda.

The project at Oude Willem exemplifies at least three of the nine new priority objectives put forward for the new CAP: climate change action, environmental care, and preserving landscapes and biodiversity. But the work that this partnership has achieved means something more to local people than business as usual. “LIFE brings people together,” says Rikus Jager, mayor of the local municipality of Westerveld.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

<https://www.nationaalpark-drents-friese-wold.nl/life-n2000/>
<https://neemo.eu/about-neemo/>
https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en

A FOCUS ON... GOOD PRACTICES

INTRODUCTION

Good practices

Identifying, collecting and disseminating inspiring project examples is a key task of the National Rural Networks and of the ENRD, respectively at national and European level. In this section we focus on the national level, where, far from being merely a formality, the collection and dissemination of high-quality projects is a great way for some NRNs to enhance their communication with rural stakeholders and to improve the image of agriculture and rural areas.

According to the data collected by the ENRD, the number of examples collected by NRNs has increased, as the implementation of RDPs also progresses, from around 400 in 2015 (data provided by 11 NRNs) to almost 9 000 by the end of 2018 (data from 30 NRNs).⁽¹⁾

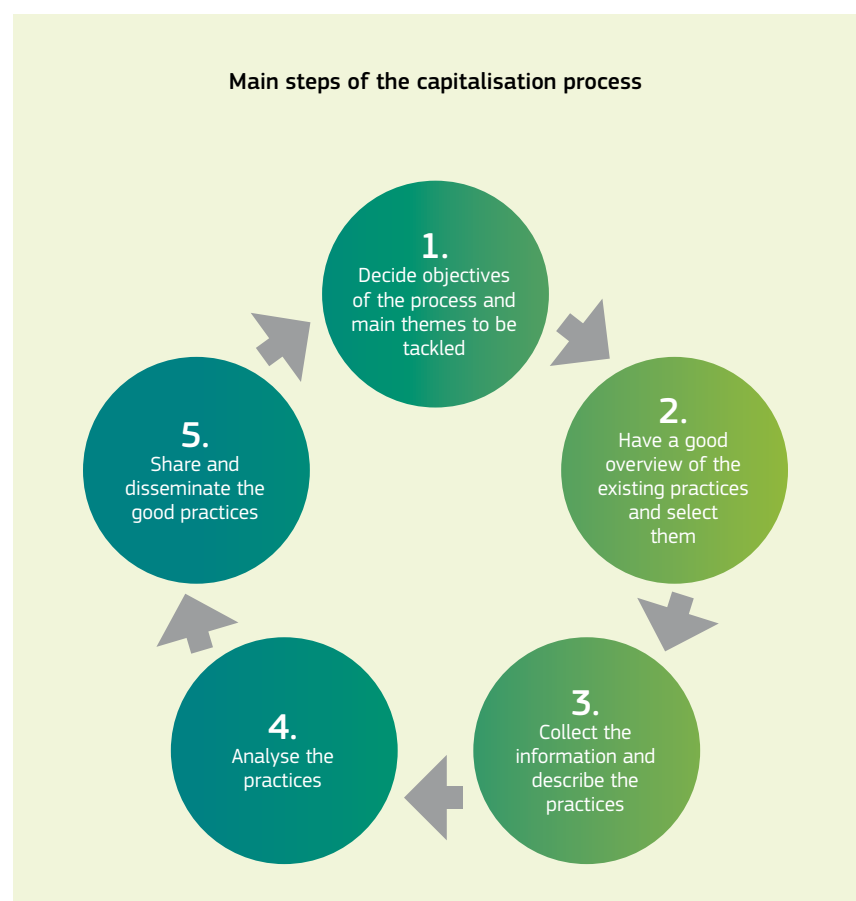
Collecting and sharing good practices – i.e. inspiring, high-quality projects that are delivering strong results – is first and foremost a way to showcase EAFRD achievements, as well as to inspire new potential applicants, to share knowledge and experiences and to further promote and improve rural development. It is also a powerful way to show the impact of European funding on the agricultural sector and rural areas across Europe.

Good practice collection and dissemination is the key to the capitalisation process, a process which

allows for making the most of the existing practical experiences and using them to create a tangible ‘capital’ of knowledge. This will help improve performance.

Defining what makes a project a ‘good practice’ is challenging. Good practices can include not only individual projects, but also particularly effective or innovative approaches to implementing Rural Development Programmes.

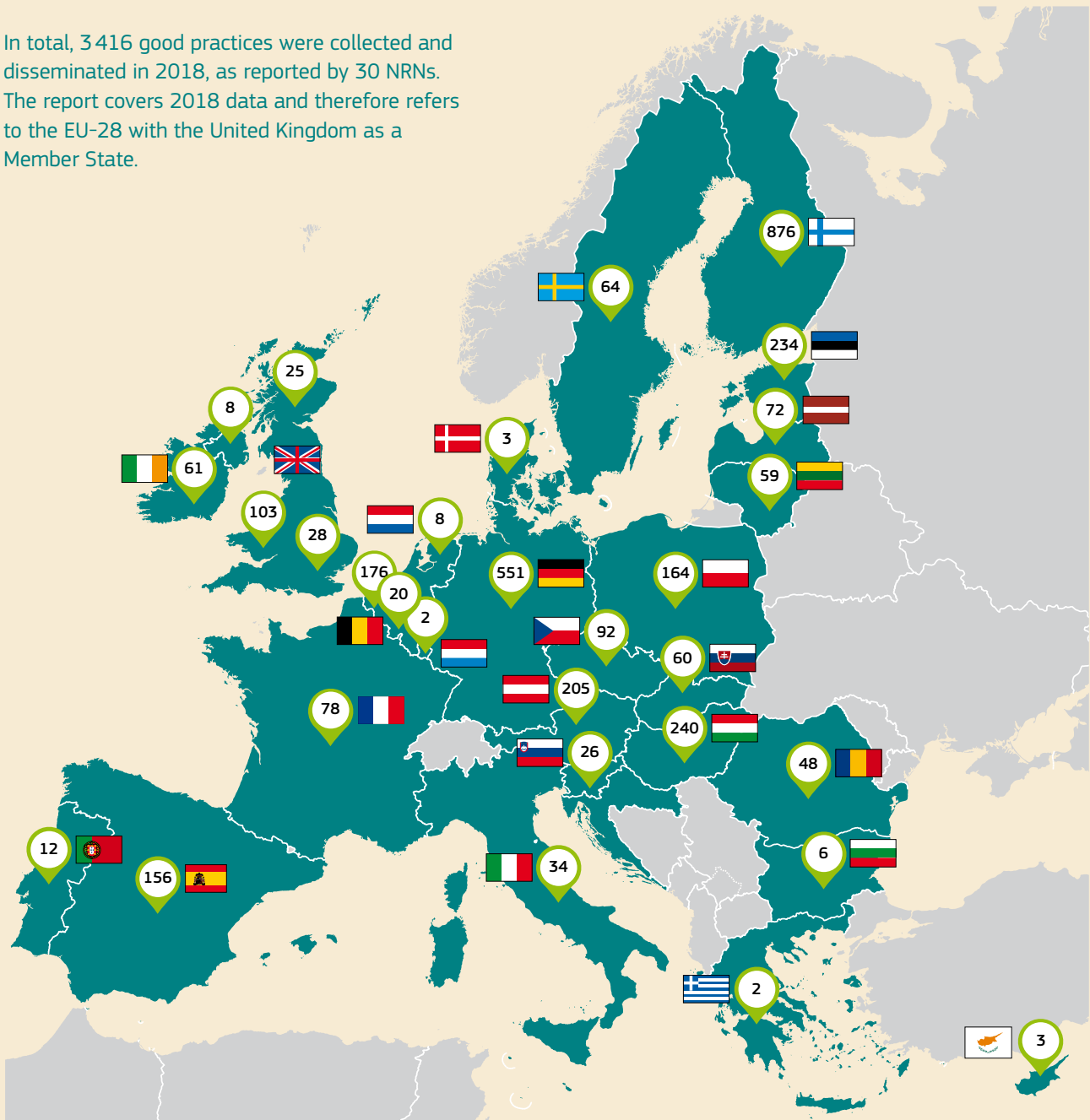
National Rural Networks often set only very basic criteria to define good practices and rely on their own and their partners’ practical knowledge and experience to identify relevant examples. In general, the



(1) The 30 NRNs who provided 2018 data include 4 from the UK and 2 from Belgium.

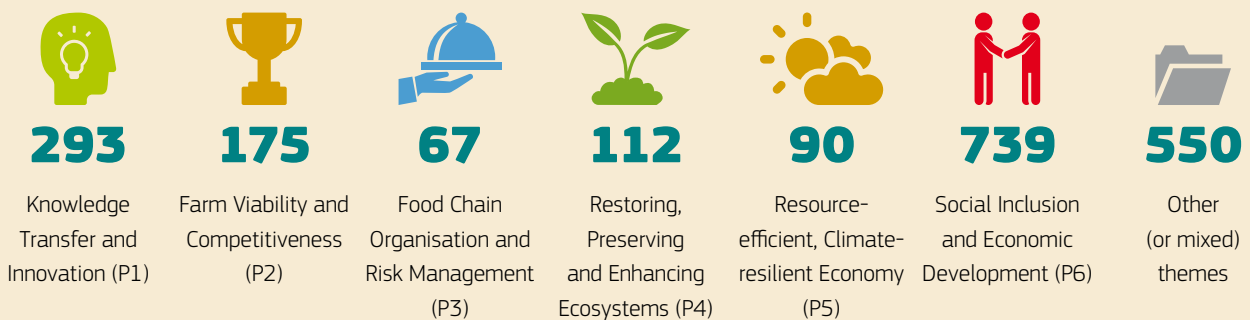
Collection of good practices by NRNs

In total, 3 416 good practices were collected and disseminated in 2018, as reported by 30 NRNs. The report covers 2018 data and therefore refers to the EU-28 with the United Kingdom as a Member State.



Source: ENRD, Common Network Statistics - Year 5 summary report, March 2020: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networking/hnn-mapping-reports_en

Number of good practice/project examples by EAFRD Priority



basic criteria include that:

- the project has been fully implemented with positive results;
- the project has introduced and validated (innovative) practices that have improved the beneficiary's performance; and,
- the practice is transferable to other contexts.

The identification of good practices should consider different aspects of the same project, not only its achievements but also its negative aspects, failures and/or unexpected challenges. All these elements will help draw lessons for future initiatives. When presenting examples, project descriptions should include not just activities and outputs but also results, even if measuring them is sometimes challenging since these may become visible only in the long term.

Direct exchanges between NRN staff and RDP beneficiaries through interviews, face-to-face meetings or site visits, for example, can provide additional information and precious feedback on the administrative aspects of implementing projects. Site visits are particularly effective in building trust between rural networks and funding beneficiaries and facilitate further connections. As they require significant resources in terms of money, time and staff, site visits are not a regular activity but are sometimes organised by NRNs as part of wider study tours or official visits by authorities.

Even the best practices will remain invisible if not appropriately disseminated. Effective communication combines a variety of channels (online and offline) and formats (texts, videos)

to reach the largest possible audience. Collecting regular feedback from users on the impact and quality of the communication activities helps NRNs assess and improve their practices.

Collaboration between NRNs and other rural development stakeholders is crucial in all phases – from identification to dissemination of good practices. Good communication and collaboration with national and regional institutions (such as Managing Authorities and Paying Agencies), rural communities (e.g. via LAGs) and local policy-makers (e.g. mayors) can ease the NRN's search for relevant practices and detailed information and can multiply the effects of its communication. Yet more evidence of the power of networks!

While National Support Units across Europe have recently been busy submitting projects for the 2020 edition of the Rural Inspiration Awards (see news page 5), we asked some NRNs about the challenges and lessons learned from their experience in collecting project examples. In the next pages we will read about regional correspondents and site visits, we will learn how websites and competitions help promote good practices and how a good practice can make a good story. Finally, we will look at on-farm demonstrations as an effective tool to share good practices and transfer knowledge.

ENRD WORKSHOP ON PROJECT EXAMPLES AND GOOD PRACTICES

This ENRD workshop brought together representatives of Network Support Units to explore ways of identifying, collecting and disseminating project examples and good practices. The event looked at the state-of-play across the EU and at various aspects of NSU work related to project examples and good practices.

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

A FOCUS ON... GOOD PRACTICES

REPORT

Identifying and collecting project examples

The majority of NRNs have set only basic criteria to define 'good practices' and rely on the experience of their staff and members/partners to identify projects that are worth disseminating as good examples. Direct contact with the project holders is often necessary to collect accurate information about an initiative and its results.

Decentralising the collection of information and making use of local correspondents is an effective way for NRNs to connect with EAFRD beneficiaries, LAGs and project promoters. This is a logical approach in countries with regionalised RDPs, but it is also used in countries with a single national RDP.

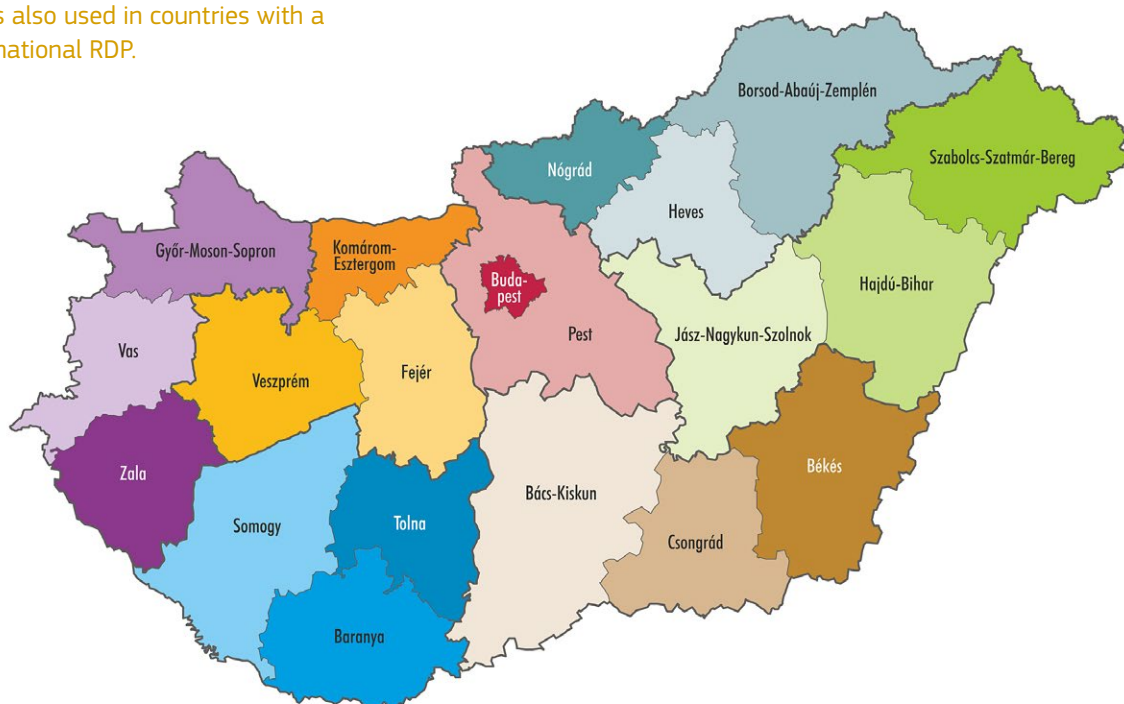
HUNGARY'S TERRITORIAL MANAGERS

The Hungarian Managing Authority outsourced the provision of Network Support Unit services to the Széchenyi Programme Office (SZPO), a public non-profit organisation that also performs other public development policy tasks. The NSU includes the Budapest headquarters, with a permanent team, and 19 territorial managers. It also collaborates with about 180 freelance experts on EU funds.

The territorial managers are based in the 19 counties of Hungary and are employed

full-time by the NRN. They identify and collect good practices in the use of EAFRD funding during local events and through regular meetings with mayors, producers and other stakeholders in their area.

Each territorial manager visits at least five mayors every month, so 95 mayors are contacted every month around the country. The territorial managers work one day a week in their local offices and are free to schedule on-site visits to mayors and/or project beneficiaries for the rest of their working time.



The NSU has not established a firm set of criteria to define what makes a project a 'good practice', so the experience and opinion of the territorial managers and the NRN's communication expert are crucial to identify the most relevant projects. The common denominator of the good practices is their positive impact on rural economies. Preference is usually given to initiatives that can be easily replicated in other areas. Particularly interesting projects are sometimes featured even if they are not easily transferable.

The territorial managers include at least one good practice per month in the county-level newsletter and report on a monthly basis to the NRN secretariat. Here the communications expert selects one of the (minimum) 19 good practices to showcase in each monthly national newsletter, while the others are promoted via the NRN's website and Facebook page.

The NRN's new website became operational in October 2019. The new

system allows territorial managers to upload directly the description of the good practices and other interesting information for their monthly reports, and both the county and national newsletters are generated automatically from these uploads. The new website has improved the users' experience and gives better visibility to good practices and county-level content.

The system of territorial managers allows effective two-way communication with the local stakeholders, including farmers and mayors. The information collected is more reliable – because it is closer to the source and easier to verify – and

the NRN can better communicate good practices as 'stories' enriched with RDP beneficiaries' feedback.

The downside of this approach is that the communication between the central NSU and the territorial managers can be complicated due to the distance. Territorial managers may sometimes feel isolated and find it hard to organise their work. Individual meetings can be difficult to arrange, but the NSU headquarters organises face-to-face meetings and training events (on Excel, Word and communications) every three months. This kind of exchange is important for internal communication and helps the territorial managers remain motivated.

i FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

<http://mnvh.eu/>

https://www.facebook.com/magyarnemzetividekihalozat/?_tn_=%2Cd%2CP-R&eid=ARB8d3GeUIHEskaB-G5HmAqlakVjidxYI2562BN2iGPvQkVVCX4yJoMg5wuWGKUtlwfvpi2qkLBZxim

POLAND: A REGIONALISED NETWORK FOR A NATIONAL RDP

The implementation of Poland's single Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 is partially decentralised. The Polish Rural Network is supported by the NSU and the coordination unit for the innovation programme in Warsaw, both located within the Agricultural Advisory Centre. In addition, there are separate support units in each of Poland's 16 regions, as well as innovation brokers in a further 19 locations. This regionalisation is necessary given the country's size and the varied make-up of Poland's rural areas, including significant differences in agricultural structure and environmental resources across the country.



The identification of good practices relies on four important features of the Polish rural network.

1. The presence of NRN staff throughout the country ensures that good or innovative practices are identified even when the stakeholders implementing them do not consider their dissemination. This can happen because they are unaware of their achievements and of the interest they are likely to generate, or simply due to lack of time. Network staff members (both in the Warsaw headquarters and in the regional offices) and innovation brokers active throughout the country identify good practices in close collaboration with Local Action Groups and public agricultural advisors.
2. Poland's Rural Network prioritises projects that are proposed by Network partners. Interesting examples can be identified through a review of the results of the

specific national and regional grants provided by the NRN to farmers and other rural stakeholders. This helps implement projects in line with the objectives of the network. Some of these projects concentrate on training or exchanging ideas to improve practices in a variety of fields. Other grants are provided to research institutes that analyse challenges and propose solutions. These projects broaden the NRN's outreach and competencies.

3. Another source of good practices is the Operational Groups (OGs) established under the Cooperation Measure of the Polish RDP. The OGs also allow the NRN to establish close contact with innovative consortia.
4. Finally, the NRN helps rural stakeholders who wish to participate in project competitions, such as the ENRD Rural Inspiration Awards. These kinds of competitions, whether at international, national or regional level,

are an important tool in identifying and promoting good practices.

Similar competitions are sometimes run among the projects financed by the NRN.

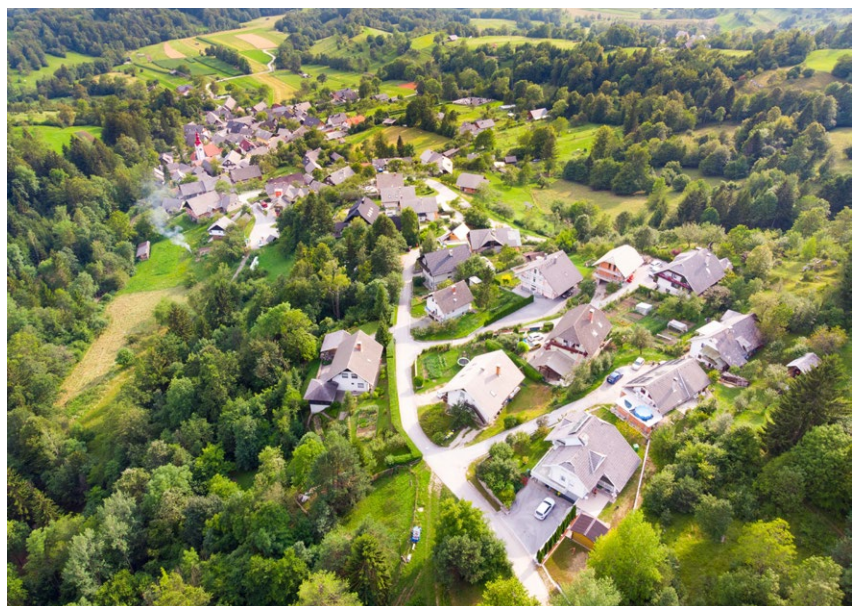
There is an ongoing discussion within the NRN about what constitutes a 'good practice'. A key criterion is the possible audience to reach. While some of the examples are worthy of broad dissemination around the EU, the NRN pays attention to identifying and disseminating practices that are interesting and relevant for local stakeholders – seemingly small achievements can be highly relevant and deserve to be spread across the country.

The NSU now aims to establish closer cooperation with the Paying Agency (PA). Identifying good practices and ensuring their dissemination are not part of the Agency's core business, but it does have access to a wealth of information. So, the NRN will seek to find ways to work with the PA more effectively.

SLOVENIAN INFO POINTS

To identify and select good practices, the Slovenian NRN relies on a network of RDP info points. These are located within the Ministry of Agriculture, the Paying Agency and the Chamber of Agriculture and Forestry, as well as the Slovenian Forest Service, the Chamber of Economy, the Institute for Nature Conservation, the Slovenian Rural Youth Association, cooperatives, farmer trade unions, the national beekeepers' association and LAG associations.

The info points are in direct contact with RDP beneficiaries throughout the Slovenian countryside. Each info point works on a single or multiple RDP Measures, also in line with the remit of the host institution or organisation.



The info points collect RDP-funded project descriptions via a standard template prepared by the NRN. The projects have to be completed and there should be no major irregularities. Apart from these basic requirements, the info points identify the good practices based on their experience, thanks to their direct contact with the project holders and knowledge of projects' development through the years. Relevant projects are also identified through personal contacts and professional networks, events (e.g. trade fairs) and media articles.

Once the projects proposed by the info points as interesting examples are confirmed to be 'correctly implemented' by the Paying Agency, they are published by the NRN and disseminated (with the beneficiary's consent) through different communication channels. The NRN includes visits to specific projects during formal visits by the Minister of Agriculture or as part of study tours. Some projects are invited to participate in events organised by the NRN.

IMPROVING THE SOCIAL STATUS OF FARMING

Farmers and their work are not sufficiently appreciated by Slovenian society. The lack of general knowledge about agriculture feeds stereotypes that depict farming as a difficult, outdated, sometimes environmentally harmful job. The lack of appreciation of farmers' work can translate into lower market prices for their products and does not encourage young people to choose farming as a profession.

To improve farmers' reputation and status among the public, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food set up an Action Plan for Young Farmers in collaboration with the Slovenian Rural Youth Association, the Chamber of Agriculture and Forestry and the NRN. Disseminating project examples contributes to the plan, particularly when the stories provide examples of new, up-to-date practices and technologies and show young farmers' innovative, ambitious ideas and solutions that respond to both market and environmental concerns.

“Farmers' stories inspire other farmers to continue with their activities and can even inspire new entrants to farming.”

Matej Štepec, NRN coordinator

“Farm presentations – especially those of family farms and young farmers – by various agricultural NGOs and media have contributed to improve the image of farming and agriculture in Slovenia,” Mr Štepec explains. “In recent years more and more media have been presenting farmers' stories, which shows that the public is interested.” There have also been national competitions for the best young farmers, the best innovative young farmers and the best young women farmers.

 FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

RDP info points: <https://www.program-podezelja.si/sl/zelite-sodelovati/info-tocke>

A FOCUS ON... GOOD PRACTICES

REPORT

Disseminating good practices

Good practices in the use of RDP funding must be disseminated to share knowledge and experience and inspire other potential applicants. But good practices also convey a more general positive message: money distributed from Brussels has a positive impact on rural businesses and communities across Europe, even in the most remote areas. This is significant for European society, well beyond the rural development community.

National Rural Networks are deploying a variety of methods and channels to ensure the effective dissemination of project examples and good practices. Communication is a journey and requires constant monitoring and adaption of one's practices.

NATIONAL RURAL AWARDS



© David Wreland

Since 2009, the Swedish NRN has organised a biennial good practices competition for projects supported through the EAFRD, the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund or LEADER. A jury chaired by the NSU manager and made up of researchers, LEADER groups representatives, local authorities and the Managing Authority evaluates the projects, nominated by a diverse group of stakeholders. The winners, including those awarded the 'Popular Vote' via online voting, receive the ram-shaped Rural Award 'Ullbaggen' during the official Rural Gala.

The Swedish Rural Awards were inspired by the LEADER of the Year Award organised in the 2000-2006 programming period and are now a well-established event for Swedish rural stakeholders. They are a powerful tool for gathering and disseminating good practices and spice up the collection and dissemination of project examples.

To ensure effective dissemination of the good practices, the Swedish NSU engages in

a comprehensive communications campaign before, during and after the Rural Gala.

Traditional/off-line and on-line media are combined to reach maximum visibility. Targeted press releases sent to local newspapers in the areas of the best practice projects work well for press and radio coverage at local level, although national media are more difficult to reach.

Short films are particularly effective for on-line dissemination. The 27 films produced in 2017 to promote the shortlisted projects were viewed over 16000 times on YouTube, received thousands of interactions on Facebook and Twitter and increased traffic to the NRN website by 1300% during the weeks preceding the final Gala.

The NRN shares the good practices examples with researchers, so they can identify success factors. To enhance dissemination, the NRN also invites project holders to network meetings, seminars and workshops so that other participants can discuss the projects with them on the spot.



© David Wreland

“ Discussing with the project holders during NRN events shows how ‘Brussels money’ benefits Sweden’s rural areas. ”

Ingrid Whitelock, Swedish NRN

The main challenge when running a good practice competition is to receive enough entries – which are good enough for the competition. So far, however, sufficient good practices have been received every year; there were 45 nominations in 2017 and 68 in 2019.

The Rural Awards’ impact on the project holders and participants goes well

beyond visibility. A case in point is the integration project ‘Ny på landet’ – ‘New to the countryside’, which won the Swedish competition in the category Social Inclusion and was a finalist for the ENRD Rural Inspiration Awards. After winning the award, Mouin, a participant of the project who came to Sweden as an unaccompanied refugee, has become a voice at both national and international levels for the Swedish NRN. The project was also exhibited at the joint CLLD event ‘Post-2020: Local action in a changing world’ in December 2019.

“ This example illustrates (the then) Commission spokesman Margaritis Schinas’ message at the networX event last April, when he called rural networks to ‘de-Brusselise the EU’ and bring the story of the European Union out of Brussels and to the real people in the Member States. ”

Ingrid Whitelock, Swedish NRN

The experience of the Rural Awards has equally facilitated the Swedish NSU’s participation in the ENRD Rural Inspiration Awards. The Swedish initiative will most likely continue in the next programming period.

MULTIPLE CHANNELS

The Spanish NRN looks at good practice dissemination as a great opportunity to motivate project beneficiaries, inspire rural entrepreneurs and celebrate the efforts made by project holders.

The NRN receives good practices mainly from RDP authorities and LEADER networks, including the two national LAG networks, the regional LAG networks and the LAGs themselves. The LEADER networks, and particularly LAGs, are especially active in sharing their project examples. Rural stakeholders can also suggest good practices, either contacting the NRN directly during events (workshops, fairs, meetings) or through a specific functionality of the NRN website. Finally, the NRN also searches for relevant initiatives on the Internet.

There are no formalised criteria used by the NSU to define good practices. When a project is proposed by the regional Managing Authorities, LAGs or LAG networks, the NRN trusts their experience. When projects are shared directly by rural stakeholders or are found through an Internet search, the NSU team discusses internally whether they can be considered as good practices.

Not having formally established selection criterion does not mean there are no

criteria applied. Projects have to clearly address the EU rural development priorities, must be completed and have to demonstrate a wider impact, for example revitalising rural areas, generating an increased sense of belonging, promoting networks or generating follow up projects. Transferability and innovation are other important aspects considered.

Once the good practices are identified, the NRN puts together as much relevant information as possible. Sometimes this is challenging, especially for less visible projects, and requires adapting the communication to the amount and quality of information available.

The good practices are then disseminated through a range of on- and off-line media. The main channels for dissemination are social media and specific publications, both printed and electronic. Good practices are featured on the NRN’s website, both as news items and via a project database, as well as in the monthly newsletter and quarterly journal. Overall, good practices are mostly presented through texts and pictures, as short summaries, detailed case studies or interviews, and the NRN is considering producing videos.

In July 2019 the NRN organised its first event for good practice exchange. The



meeting was also an opportunity to collect stakeholders’ feedback on the NRN’s good practice communication. Suggestions included aiming for a wider audience, including urban areas, universities or businesses, in order to better connect ‘rural with urban and vice-versa’; using more ‘catchy’ ways to disseminate success stories (e.g. videos); and measuring communication impacts.

The NRN is considering organising similar good practice exchange events in the future. Meanwhile, as they enjoyed participating in the Rural Inspiration Awards, they are eager to see the results of the 2020 edition!

A FOCUS ON... GOOD PRACTICES

INTERVIEW

From good practices to good stories

Louise Bogey

Press and Communication Officer at the European Commission – DG Agriculture and Rural Development, explains how to transform a ‘good practice’ into a ‘good story’.



© Louise Bogey

How do you know a good project can become a good story?

Rural development projects are a key component of DG AGRI's communication, representing the second pillar of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). By communicating about small-scale and local projects that directly or indirectly benefit the rural areas, we give a ‘human face’ to our policy.

On choosing a project for a good story, I think multiple factors come into play. There are firstly topics that generally interest our audiences more than others. For example, there's a strong interest in technology and innovation as well as implementing environmentally friendly practices. However, that might not be enough. We need to also have a good overview of the project, including tangible objectives and the benefits that will arise from it. We can then translate it into a nice story for social media or an article for instance. This is also

why I believe that any project can be a good story, it's more about having the right information and good visuals.

Why are visuals so important?

Today, social media play a key role in communications to either raise awareness or get people to read more on a topic or on an event. However, reaching our audience can be challenging when there is already so much content out there, competing for their attention. So having visuals, and good ones, can make the difference. It helps to first catch the attention, and then complement the project description to give a full picture to the reader.

If an interesting project does not have good visuals or no visuals at all, I would usually insist on getting some before communicating about it. However if this is not possible for one reason or another, a good option is to combine the project visuals with generic nice ones. Combined, they will still give an idea to the reader of what the project is about and will still be visually attractive.

How do you evaluate the impact of good practice communication?

The primary objective of our communication activities is to raise awareness of the CAP, and in this specific case of the rural development projects funded by the CAP. So we set objectives on how many people we want to reach and engage with. We

will then compare them with the results we get. This is the most tangible way to evaluate if the communication activities are successful.

On a long-term basis, it can be challenging to really know if we have managed to inspire other people or encourage new applications. Nonetheless, it is important to consult and get feedback from rural networks through surveys for instance. This allows us to get to know our audience better and therefore adapt our activities.

What are the benefits of good communication for projects?

Good communication of rural development projects can provide benefit at various levels. Firstly, it can inspire businesses, farmers or even individuals to launch or to apply for funding for their own projects. Applying for EU funds can seem complex and out of reach, but if potential beneficiaries see examples of similar projects receiving funding, it can seem more realistic and achievable. Similarly, it can give ideas to launch new projects across the EU.

Secondly, it is also the opportunity to give visibility to the beneficiaries and their projects at EU/ international level. This can benefit a business for example, by reaching potential customers or creating new opportunities.

Finally, communicating about these projects is important on a more general level. It explains in a very concrete way where EU funding goes, and what and who it benefits.

Are there some projects that stayed with you – and why?

One project stayed with me as I think it tackled a crucial aspect of rural life – isolation. It was also the first time I came across a rural development project that focused on this. The project's aim was to set up an on-demand bus service in a Welsh rural area (https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/projects-practice/demand-rural-bus-service-rural-wales_en). The idea is simple but effective. By giving easy access to the closest town to go shopping or visit friends and family, the bus can improve the rural population's quality of life, especially people with reduced mobility or who do not own a car. Additionally, it counters the general trend of rural areas lacking reliable public transport.

REPORT

On-farm demonstrations 2.0



On-farm demonstrations can be great opportunities for peer-to-peer learning. The FarmDemo project has developed practical tools to stimulate and enhance on-farm demonstrations.



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Farmers generally consider other farmers to be a reliable source of information. Demonstration activities have been key for peer-to-peer knowledge exchange in agriculture for over 100 years and farmers are increasingly opening their farms to connect with their colleagues and the general public as part of business development strategies (e.g. short food supply chains, community supported agriculture).

On-farm demonstrations can have multiple impacts. By learning new techniques or adopting new technologies, farmers can increase their efficiency of production and so their farms' profitability. Technologies can improve farmers' working conditions, lightening farm chores, reducing health risks and providing some free time. Acquiring new skills can also enhance farmers' self-reliance and resilience. As

a positive 'side effect', demonstration activities can contribute to networking and stimulate innovation, promoting long-term sustainability and economic development in rural areas.

While on-farm demonstrations can effectively help farms innovate and adapt to changing circumstances, very little is known about their current numbers, approaches, effectiveness, or inclusivity. To address this lack of information, three Horizon 2020 projects on on-farm demonstrations (see box) joined forces to develop the FarmDemo project. Through extensive field research on nearly 60 cases across Europe, FarmDemo identified trends and success factors for on-farm demonstrations.

Demonstrations generally concern ways to improve production and focus on technical innovation related to individual aspects of farming rather than on whole-farm

approaches. This is because technical aspects are easier to demonstrate in a physical setting (e.g. outdoors or agricultural sheds) than topics like farm succession and farm business management.

The most common topics for demonstrations generally reflect the dominant farming types in each region. For example, environmental aspects are particularly common in Northern Europe and typically highlight the economic benefits of environmental actions. In Slovakia, demonstrations often concern very specific topics (such as berries, organic farming, social innovation) and are mainly held on small farms. In Germany, there are strong regional differences: there are fewer but bigger farms in the eastern states and more but smaller farms in the south and west. In general, demonstrations are more likely to occur on organic than conventional farms, and farmer networks can receive funding for demo activities, especially on topics of public interest like nature conservation and animal welfare.

Often, demonstrations are organised as oral presentations by a demonstrator or expert, possibly with a question and answer session afterwards. An approach that really stimulates peer-to-peer learning – what we could call a ‘demonstration 2.0’ – needs to go a step further and provide opportunities for more complex interaction between the demonstrator and the participants and/or within the group of participants.

There are three basic principles for a ‘demonstration 2.0’: relate learning content to the farming practice (real life conditions); engage participants in active knowledge exchange; and use a variety of learning methods (e. g. field walks, observing practical demonstrations, hands-on activities with techniques that engage multiple senses – sight, taste, smell, touch).

Monitoring the results of on-farm demonstrations – through observation, videos, and/or participant surveys – is an exciting challenge. Through focus groups and phone interviews with participants (at least six months after demonstrations),



© DemoFarm

FarmDemo is a close collaboration between three Horizon 2020 projects: AgriDemo-F2F, PLAID and NEFERTITI. The FarmDemo Hub (<https://farmdemo.eu/hub/>) is an online EU-wide inventory of more than 1 400 demonstration farms. It details the sectors, themes and topics on which the farms provide expertise. It is easily searchable and allows registered farmers to showcase their farms and activities to increase their visibility.

FarmDemo has produced a Training Kit (<https://trainingkit.farmdemo.eu>) with online tools, video tutorials and ‘tips & tricks’ for effective on-farm demonstrations. The FarmDemo Design Guide, available in 11 languages, explores six elements for preparing, carrying out and evaluating on-farm demonstrations.

FarmDemo has set up ten interactive thematic networks bringing together 45 regional hubs of demo-farmers and stakeholders in 17 countries. More than 200 FarmDemo demonstration events take place every year in Europe and are open to interested participants: <https://nefertiti-h2020.eu/NefertitiPortal/#/dashboard>

A lively FarmDemo online community facilitates networking among demonstration farmers and other innovation actors in Europe and is open for new collaborations with relevant projects. You are welcome to join: <https://farmdemo.eu>

we learnt that demonstrations with small groups (less than 25 attendees) with facilitated discussions and stimulating reflective thinking were particularly effective in promoting a change of practices. Of course, behavioural change is a long-term process.

i FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

FarmDemo: <https://farmdemo.eu/>
Twitter: [@NEFERTITI_EU](https://twitter.com/NEFERTITI_EU)

Books & publications

Ready, steady, green!

LIFE helps farming and forestry adapt to climate change

European Commission – Environment Directorate-General



Through the LIFE programme, a broad range of adaptation measures are being tested to support farmers and foresters in the EU in introducing climate-smart production methods. The publication looks at a series of LIFE projects in agriculture and

forestry, and how LIFE is contributing to climate change adaptation in agriculture and forestry.

ISBN 978-92-76-08009-1

https://ec.europa.eu/easme/sites/easme-site/files/life_cca-forest_agri-pdf

The professional status of rural women in the EU

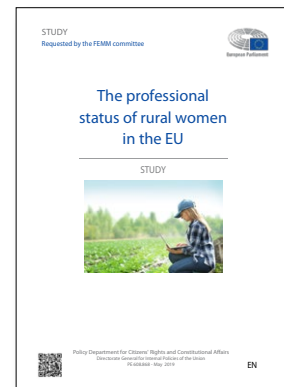
Directorate-General for Internal Policies of the Union (European Parliament), University of Zagreb Faculty of Agriculture

This study gives an overview of the professional status of rural women in the EU, as well as their employment situation and position in the labour market in rural areas. The study identifies best practices implemented in the Member States and concludes with policy recommendations on the improvement of the employment situation and legal status of women living in rural areas of the EU.

The study was commissioned by the European Parliament's Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs at the request of the FEMM Committee (Women's rights and gender equality).

ISBN 978-92-846-4673-9

<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/dd3d08da-90ac-11e9-9369-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-103874510>



Digital Opportunities for Better Agricultural Policies

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

Recent digital innovations provide opportunities to deliver better policies for the agriculture sector by helping to overcome information gaps and asymmetries, lower policy-related transaction costs, and enable people with different preferences and incentives to work better together.

Drawing on ten illustrative case studies and unique new data gathered via an OECD questionnaire on agri-environmental policy organisations' experiences with digital tools, this report explores opportunities to improve current agricultural and agri-environmental policies, and to deliver new, digitally enabled and information-rich policy approaches.

ISBN 9789264887855

https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/agriculture-and-food/digital-opportunities-for-better-agricultural-policies_571a0812-en#page1



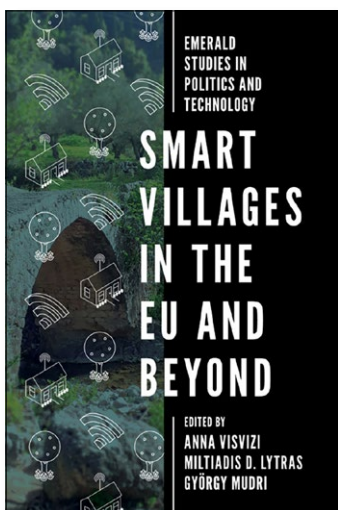


Family Farming in Spain 2019

Union of Small Farmers and Breeders (UPA)

The topic of this year's update is 'A new social commitment to rural areas. A new future is possible'. The report looks at various social issues that are relevant for rural areas, including depopulation and support to young farmers in the new CAP, as well as environmental issues.

http://www.upa.es/upa/_depot/_adjuntos/5094e22aefc6b421560852122.pdf



Smart Villages in the EU and Beyond

A. Visvizi, M. D. Lytras, G. Mudri

Written by leading academics and practitioners in the field, this book offers a detailed insight into issues and developments that shape the debate on smart villages, together with concepts, developments and policymaking initiatives including EU Action for Smart Villages.

Using country-specific case studies, the chapters examine how integrated and ICT-conscious strategies and policy actions focused on wellbeing, sustainability and solidarity could provide a long-term solution in the revitalisation of villages across the EU and elsewhere. Best practices pertinent to precision farming, energy diversification, tourism, and entrepreneurship are discussed in detail.

ISBN 9781787698468

<https://books.emeraldinsight.com/page/detail/Smart-Villages-in-the-EU-and-Beyond/?k=9781787698468>

ENRD PUBLICATIONS

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

These are available on the Publications section of <https://enrd.ec.europa.eu> by filling in the online form at <https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/publications/search>.

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 (DE; EN; ES; FR; IT; PL).

No.29 – LEADER Achievements



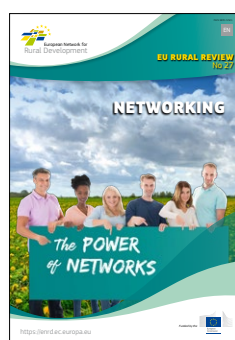
KF-AJ-19-002-EN-N

No.28 – Mainstreaming the bioeconomy



KF-AJ-19-001-EN-N

No.27 – Networking



KF-AJ-18-002-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 (DE; EN; ES; FR; IT; PL).

Rural Inspiration Awards 2019



KF-AP-19-002-EN-N

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Youth and Generational Renewal



KF-AP-18-003-EN-N

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EU publications

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