

This joint ENRD & Copa-Cogeca workshop brought together representatives of the Network Support Units (NSUs) and members of Copa Cogeca for the first time in a joint workshop looking into deepening stakeholder engagement.

The event explored how networks can be increasingly interlinked and specifically focused on improving connections between farmers, farmer cooperatives and National Rural Networks (NRNs). It highlighted existing good practice and identified needs for future development.

Interactive sessions allowed workshop participants to discuss examples of successful engagement between NRNs and the wider farming networks, as well as exchange on plans for improved joint working and actions.

Workshop Highlights

State-of-play

DG AGRI, ENRD CP and Copa-Cogeca opened the event. They explained that the proposals for the future CAP Networks build on networking's positive achievements to date and take into account the new CAP design. They see a reinforced role for networking and were an "[evolution not a revolution](#)" in approach. An initial series of presentations identified the benefits available from networking for a broad spectrum of agricultural stakeholders and for other rural development bodies. There should be continuity of the successes of networking including by building on the constructive inputs and relationships with EU agricultural organisations within the networks.

Advantages included possibilities for connecting stakeholders from different MS and regions, promoting collaboration and exchanging knowledge and innovation across rural Europe through shared networks, and examples of these were presented by both the [ENRD Contact Point](#) and the [EIP-AGRI Service Point](#).

Presentations from the [Federation of Swedish Farmers](#) and [Portugal's NRN](#) provided workshop delegates with insight into options of how agricultural bodies are already involved in rural networking and the success factors. The latter include targeted activity which brings in thematic agri-food expertise, and an emphasis on practical peer-to-peer field visits. It is useful to identify and optimise the role of 'multipliers', 'brokers' or 'influencers' e.g. networking specialists or well-known personalities within agri-food sectors who hold credibility among their peers.

The Q&A session following the workshop's morning presentations pointed to the need for future EU and National CAP Networks to be designed in a way that makes them relevant for agri-food sectors.: It was noted that developing multi-lingual communication tools would greatly benefit exchange of knowledge and good practices among farmers and other farming stakeholders across Europe, for example translating material developed at EU level.

Event Information

Title: ENRD Joint Workshop with Copa-Cogeca on Stakeholder Engagement: 'Cultivating network connections'

Date: 5 February 2020

Location: Brussels, Belgium

Organisers: ENRD Contact Point

Participants: 53 NSU representatives & Copa Cogeca members

Outcomes: Exchanges on how to engage stakeholders more effectively, and on future activities

Web page: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/joint-enrd-copa-cogeca-workshop-cultivating-network-connections_en



A diverse panorama of network activities

A 'speed networking' session between participants pointed to the differing roles of both farmer organisations and NRNs across the EU.

- There is great diversity between the NRNs, and especially between the roles of the NSUs e.g.
 - Some NSUs are involved with: representing stakeholder views to the managing authorities; issuing project calls under the NRN budget; and involving stakeholders in consultations on the CAP Strategic Plans.
 - Some NSUs are already engaged with Pillar I actors while for others it is new territory.
 - A wide range of relationships exist between NSUs and farmers' unions – some very strong, some very weak and some which are mixed, including regional differences.
- The role of the farmers' organisations in NRN and ENRD activities also varies widely e.g.
 - Some organisations already have strong engagement with ENRD and NRN work.
 - Many farming organisations already act as relays for the networks' activities.
 - Some organisations are not represented across all EU Member States and it was suggested that NRNs could become involved in helping to extend their reach as a relay.

Looking Forward

In their recommendations, workshop participants encouraged:

- *Future CAP networks* to adopt inclusive approaches covering farmers, advisors, researchers, farmers' organisations, innovation brokers, consumers and other useful stakeholders.
- *Existing rural networks* to engage a wider range of stakeholders from the agri-food and forestry sectors. Other new stakeholders could be reached through EU programmes such as other European Structural & Investment Funds, LIFE or Horizon.

Engagement can be increased by bringing similar local initiatives together across Europe and by training animators to involve a wider range of stakeholders. This could also entail supporting communities to monitor and ensure that the development decisions they propose are actually implemented.



NRN activities should promote digital connectivity and help to tackle the challenges of isolation faced by remote populations.

There is an important opportunity for NRNs to deepen links between farming organisations and other key stakeholders including territorial and environmental organisations, advisors and researchers within Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS).

The differing situations between Member States can provide an opportunity for networks to share knowledge through peer to peer exchanges.

Concluding messages

- In the long term, stakeholders will only become more engaged in the networks if they perceive that this results in tangible improvements in policy implementation in areas which affect them.
- Farming organisations are already in quite a strong position to influence policy so will naturally ask "what's in it for us – where can NRNs really add value to what we already do?" To play their role effectively rural networks also need input from the agricultural sector, from farmers and from farming organisations.
- On the one hand, this can involve NRNs "reaching out to create neutral spaces" for wider alliances between farming stakeholders and other organisations and, on the other hand, it can involve "reaching down" and supporting practical implementation in fields directly relevant to specific farming stakeholders (e.g. through EIP-AGRI Operational Groups), and for those stakeholder to explore their own contribution to networking.
- Networks face a major challenge (and opportunity) in helping to improve exchange and overcome any differences between networking approaches and network reach, which means being prioritising all available resources.