

RURAL BUSINESSES – THE FUTURE IS NOW

An ENRD seminar about revitalising rural areas through business innovation

30th March 2017

Hotel Metropole, Brussels

Background

Rural areas and rural economies are undergoing massive change. Rural businesses – *both farm and non-farm* – are having to navigate the future in the face of increasingly competitive and volatile global value chains, climate change, resource depletion, major population shifts, digitisation and rapidly evolving new technologies. In this situation, business as usual is simply not an option.

The future for rural businesses is, and has to be, now. In this spirit, the recent Cork Declaration argues that rural areas have a number of potential advantages which can create the conditions for future rural prosperity and vitality as well as deliver “innovative, inclusive and sustainable solutions for current and future societal challenges”.

There is already a very wide range of EU, national and regional initiatives designed to help European businesses to make the most of the challenges and opportunities mentioned above. These include policies for *digitisation*, *smart specialisation* and *social innovation*. This seminar will allow different rural stakeholders to:

- Examine these and other **key policies for business innovation through a rural lens**. Participants will be able to share lessons and experience about how support tools can be made ‘fit for rural business’ (in other words, initiate ‘rural proofing’ as recommended by the Cork 2.0 Declaration).
- Share inspiring examples of business innovation and **explore how such initiatives can be extended in practice through the Rural Development Programmes**.

The Rural Development Programmes deploy a powerful combination of measures and tools which can support all kinds of rural businesses. These include an expected 2600 LEADER groups and some 3200 Operational Groups as well as measures for knowledge transfer, advice and a range of investment measures. Participants will explore how RDP support to business innovation can be coordinated and improved - both now and in the future.

Agenda – Thursday 30th March 2017

8.30 – 9.00 **Registration of participants**

9.00 – 9.10 **Welcome and introductory remarks:** Josefine Loriz-Hoffmann, Director, DG AGRI. Paul Soto, Team Leader, ENRD Contact Point

9.10 – 9.30 **Keynote: Opportunities for business innovation in today's rapidly changing rural world:** José-Enrique Garcilazo, Head of Unit Rural Programme, OECD, Paris

9.30 – 11.00 **Plenary: Looking at innovation policies through a rural lens**

- *Examples of how rural communities and businesses are putting into place innovative solutions.*
 - *Arctic Smart Community Cluster. Ilari Havukainen + Johannes Vallivaara*
 - *Ludgate Digital Hub, Grainne Dwyer*
 - *Eigg Heritage Trust, Amanda Bryan*

- *Policy panel: How to ensure EU policies reach and are useful for rural businesses?*
 - *Smart Specialisation, Jan Larosse, DG REGIO*
 - *Digital Innovation Hubs, Ronan Burgess, DG CONNECT*
 - *Social Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship, Patrick Klein, DG GROW*

11.00 – 11.30 **Coffee**

11.30 – 13.00 **Parallel workshops. Making support tools for business innovation work in rural areas**

1. **Rural Digital Hubs.** *How to ensure that they successfully help rural businesses seize the opportunities of digitisation?*
 - *Swedish Local Fibre Alliance, Per Fröling*
 - *Lozère Digital Network, France, Frédéric Dumortier*

2. **Business accelerators and other tools for supporting change in rural businesses.** *How to encourage new ideas - from farm and non-farm businesses - and get them successfully to the market?*
 - *Growbiz, Scotland, Jackie Brierton*
 - *Thesaloniki Accelerator, Greece, Mara Tsoumari*

3. **Social innovation in rural areas.** *How to build capacity, mobilise resources and generate new economic activities?*
 - *3 EVA. Aude, France, Peter Wollny*
 - *Alston Moor, England, Sue Gilbertson*

13.00 – 14.00 *Lunch*

14.00 – 14.30 **Plenary: Report back from workshops**

14.30 – 16.00 **Parallel workshops: Improving smart business support through the RDPs**

1. Extending business innovation through **LEADER (M19)**. *How can LAGs be enabled to provide more effective support to promising but potentially risky new business ideas and projects?*
 - *Leader Central Cataluña, Spain, Eduard Barcons*
 - *Ayrshire LAG, Scotland, Sarah Hyslop*
2. Extending business innovation through **Cooperation (M.16)**. *How can the Cooperation measure be made more effective in supporting business ideas get to the market?*
 - *Austrian MA, Martina Titlbach-Supper*
3. Using the RDPs to implement **smart business-support packages**. *How can key measures in the RDPs be best combined to support innovation among both farm and non-farm businesses?*
 - *Finnish MA, Juuso Kalliokoski*
 - *Basque Regional MA, Spain, Irma Maria Basterra Ugarriza + Jone Fernández Landa*

Coffee will be served in the rooms

16.00 – 16.30 **Final Plenary and Concluding Remarks**

- Feedback from workshops and closing comments by Neda Skakelja, Head of Unit, DG AGRI