



Report of the 17th meeting of the
European Rural Networks'
Steering Group

Webinar, 16 May 2022

Introduction	
<p>9.00 – 9.10 Introduction</p> <p>Mario Milouchev, DG AGRI (Chair)</p>	<p>Participants at the 17th Steering Group (SG) meeting were welcomed by the Chair with an opening message reviewing the event’s aims and agenda which covered the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update on the state of play of the CAP Reform and other EU policy initiatives. • Update on the preparation of the Rural Pact, including stakeholder feedback and the upcoming EU Conference. • Report from the EU Rural Networks’ Assembly Subgroups. • Planned and recent activities of the European Rural Networks. • Update on future networking arrangements and future Governance of the EU CAP Network. • Ideas for the next Rural Networks’ Governance meetings. <p>A list of ENRD networking activities (sent to SG members with the meeting agenda) was highlighted and Mr Milouchev noted that meetings such as the SG were expected to return to being held in Brussels in person again in the future. Ongoing sharing of activities and knowledge through ENRD and national events would help to strengthen networking’s added value. This could continue to be facilitated through the CAP’s transitional arrangements for rural networking until the Member States’ new national networks become active following the approval of the CAP Strategic Plans (CSPs).</p>
Update on EU policies, DG AGRI	
<p>9.10 – 10.00 Update on EU Policies</p> <p>Kai Heikkila and Orsolya Frizon-Somogyi, DG AGRI</p>	<p>Kai Heikkila’s presentation from DG AGRI’s CSP coordination unit (C1) updated SG members with CSP progress referring to the importance of ambitious CSPs providing strong policy contributions. Flexibility for regional arrangements within the CSP legal framework were outlined, as was the need for networking detail in CSP documents to clearly cover the full CAP mandate.</p> <p>CSP discussions between Commission Services and Member States via the Observation Letters (and subsequent follow-up) were explained within the context of adding value to CSPs. Partnership principles are helping design CSPs that directly contribute to CAP and other related policy arenas e.g. Rural Pact / Long-term Vision for Rural Areas.</p> <p>Current work on CSP design will help strengthen CSP capacity for (<i>inter alia</i>) supporting the environment, rural areas, and cohesion with other policies. The process is on track for CSPs to become operational on 1 January 2023. Rural networks can continue to provide value during the CSP finalisation stages by for example enabling stakeholder dialogue.</p> <p>A question from Germany’s Chamber of Agriculture about possible CSP considerations in the current Ukraine crisis was answered by DG AGRI</p>

Note: Presentations, documents and event summaries can be accessed and directly downloaded by clicking on the links provided

observing that a Commission Services [Communication of March 23 2022](#) directs measures for meeting needs caused by the crisis. The CAP is only one of the EU's policy instruments. CSPs should retain their long-term perspective. CSPs' resilience roles can help improve the security of food and energy supplies.

A question from the Council of European Municipalities and Regions was answered by DG AGRI confirming that CSP assessment processes include checks on stakeholder consultation and coherence with other policies. The latter assesses synergy and efficiency. A wide range of different types of stakeholder consultations on CSPs has already occurred and this has happened differently according to each Member State's own approach.

The Chair concluded that CSPs can be revised until they are approved, and climate ambitions will remain important during the final agreements.

Orsolya Frizon-Somogyi from DG AGRI's research and innovation unit (F2) made a [presentation](#) highlighting opportunities for Member States to align CSPs with current EU research priorities for soil and wider agroecology matters including organics, animal welfare, and agricultural data. National networks can help by raising their stakeholders' awareness of such opportunities. The networks are also well-positioned as outreach channels to disseminate and multiply knowledge from research-funded results for the CAP.

New HORIZON priorities for [Cluster 6](#) research funding were spotlighted and SG members were informed on how network partners from EIP-AGRI could be involved by 'bridging' more gaps between the research community and CAP beneficiaries. Farm advisors and related networks were expected to be key. Possibilities from HORIZON Missions, Living Labs, and Lighthouses were all featured in the SG presentation which also drew attention to September's [European Research & Innovation Days](#).

Update on the Rural Pact, DG AGRI

10.00 – 10.45
Update on the
Rural Pact

Alexandre Martin,
DG AGRI

A [presentation](#) to SG members by **Alexandre Martin** from DG AGRI's Rural Areas and Networks unit (D1) focused on how the Rural Pact conference (15 - 16 June in Brussels) aims to help rural Europe become 'Stronger, Connected, Prosperous and Resilient'. The Rural Pact community was launched in December 2021 and now has some 900 members. SG members were encouraged to join. A structure has been proposed on how the Rural Pact should be governed. The Rural Pact community is now being consulted on this proposal which aims to help amplify rural voices, bring rural issues into the political agenda at different levels and could involve a networking aspect.

Note: Presentations, documents and event summaries can be accessed and directly downloaded by clicking on the links provided

The work carried out by the ENRD Thematic Groups dedicated to the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas, is helping stakeholders engaging in the Rural Pact. It involves identifying and sharing holistic solutions to rural challenges. This will be progressed during and after the Conference including through online facilities.

The Chair commented that the Rural Pact will be a step-by-step process for building collaboration between national and regional financing with EU level financing. SG members from ELARD and the European Rural Parliament indicated their support for the Rural Pact process and the principles of making multilevel governance work better across rural Europe.

Recent and Planned Network Activities

11.15 – 12.15
Update on CAP
networking

David Lamb,
Pacôme Elouna
Eyenga,
Hannes Wimmer

An update was given by the EU Rural Networks' support units, starting with a presentation of ENRD Contact Point activities.

David Lamb, the new Team Leader for the ENRD Contact Point, [presented](#) the Contact Point's 2022 Annual Work Plan highlighting its direct contributions to CAP and networking objectives. Thematic Group work underway includes Sustainability Agreements, Carbon Farming, Rural Proofing, Rural Revitalization, and LEADER. Rural Network Clusters are evolving productively and the second Forum on Best Practices in the Agri-food Supply Chain is also being scheduled. Other topics in the pipeline for later in 2022 cover CAP opportunities for organics, fairer distribution of CAP payments, agro-forestry, eco-schemes, landscape, rural women, and youth. All these work is complemented by CSP analytical screening, good practice case studies, publications, and other networking content including the 2022 Rural Inspiration Awards.

Pacôme Elouna Eyenga, Team Leader at the EIP-AGRI Support Facility [presented](#) a summary of recent actions in relation to the Facility's aforementioned role as a bridge connecting research with the CAP. Details about different networking formats (seminars, focus groups, workshops) were described in CAP subject areas such as farm data, digitalization, pesticides, nutrients, water, forests, and soil. The success of EIP outreach work was also highlighted.

Hannes Wimmer, Team Leader at the ENRD Evaluation Helpdesk, [presented](#) their expanded Team's recent and planned networking activities grouped by supporting evidence and analysis for the CAP, guidance and capacity building. Coordination with other ENRD support units was noted for future work on assessing the LEADER added value, AKIS, and the CAP's New Delivery Model. Work on Animal welfare indicator and guidance on the Evaluation Plan and

Note: Presentations, documents and event summaries can be accessed and directly downloaded by clicking on the links provided

the assessment of AKIS will be among the Evaluation Helpdesk topics already in 2022. These will be complemented in 2022 and 2023 with the mapping of CAP implementation and the establishment of an online catalogue of CAP interventions, as well as with the synthesis of the Member States' ex-ante evaluations of the CSP.

SG members appreciated the wide-ranging scale and scope of the ENRD support units and noted the benefits that digital networking had provided for achieving participation and inclusion in rural networking. The support units' evolving expertise in both online and offline events was seen to provide useful opportunities for maintaining and improving the quantity and quality of stakeholder participation in future CAP networking. Helping stakeholders reduce travel costs and networking's carbon footprint was promoted.

'Functional rural areas' and 'Mental health in rural areas' were among cross-cutting topics noted by SG members as relevant for the Rural Pact and possibly support units. Membership of the Help Desk Thematic Groups was also clarified.

Feedback from recent Assembly's subgroups

13.30 – 14.00
Feedback from recent Assembly's subgroups

Karin Ellermann-Kügler, German Chambers of Agriculture

Maura Farrell, Irish NRN

A reflection on the two Assembly subgroups was provided to remind SG members of their roles and lessons learned.

Feedback on the EIP-AGRI Subgroup on Innovation was provided by **Karin Ellermann-Kügler** from the German Chambers of Agriculture who reiterated the subgroup's usefulness for farmers and advisors. Knowledge exchange and dissemination of good practices are at the core of the subgroup which (since 2015) has successfully networked expertise from managing authorities, advisory services, NRNs, research organisations, and institutes, as well as EU bodies. Examples of this were provided. The benefits of continuing subgroup operations were highlighted within a simplified system that helps to further facilitate cooperation between agri-food value chain stakeholders and research. Farmers and farm advisors should remain core partners.

Feedback on the LEADER/CLLD Subgroup was provided by **Maura Farrell** from Ireland's NRN. She emphasised this subgroup's worth as a channel for helping EU level policy be better understood and shaped through Member State expertise and inputs. The subgroup's membership of nearly 100 different stakeholders makes peer-to-peer learning happen in practice and this was seen to expand the EU's collective understanding about how LEADER's delivery can be optimised in different situations. The rural networks were advocated for their ability to disseminate and multiply LEADER learning that was inspired by the subgroup.

Note: Presentations, documents and event summaries can be accessed and directly downloaded by clicking on the links provided

	The Chair replied to a point about subgroup membership confirming that the governance arrangements for the new EU CAP network would reflect experience from the ENRD.
Ideas for the governance of the EU CAP Network	
11.20 – 12.05 Ideas for the governance of the EU CAP Network Tatjana Borbas, DG AGRI	Tatjana Borbas from DG AGR’s networking unit (D1) gave a presentation about the future EU CAP Network governance. The draft implementing act for this will provide an operational structure that is expected to ensure continuity with the ENRD via an Assembly, Steering Group, and three permanent subgroups. The latter are proposed to cover: CSPs; innovation and knowledge exchange; and LEADER and territorial development. The implementing act is planned to be adopted after June 2022. Transition arrangements were outlined for the period up to the approval of CSPs and coordination with the framework for Civil Dialogue Groups will continue. October 2022 is the target date for the new EU CAP Network’s launch.
Outlook	
14.45– 15.30 Outlook Mario Milouchev, DG AGRI	<p>The Chair invited SG members to submit ideas by 25 May for the next Assembly meeting’s agenda. This would be the final ENRD Assembly before the new EU CAP Network’s governance structure starts. Suggestions for agenda items included updates on: CSP preparations; Rural Pact; HORIZON and rural research; rural skills; as well as CAP and cohesion policy synergy.</p> <p>The French NRN profiled their recent demographics study on COVID-19 impacts which found no significant evidence of urban populations moving into the countryside as a result of the pandemic crisis.</p>
Study on the ENRD’s and NRN’s contribution to rural development policy	
15.30– 15.50 ENRD and NRN study Monika Beck, ADE	Monika Beck from the ADE consultancy presented an overview of their study for DG AGRI exploring ENRD and NRN contributions to rural development policy. The study’s concept, programming periods, key steps, and timeline were described. A reminder was made asking SG members to contribute to the study’s survey. Findings will help inform the EU CAP Network’s outlook.
Closing remarks	
15.50 – 16.00 Closing remarks Mario Milouchev, DG AGRI	<p>The Chair replied to a question about performance indicators for CAP networking drawing attention to such actions being funded under CAP Technical Assistance.</p> <p>SG members were thanked for their strategic inputs and support during the ENRD period. Mr Milouchev looked forward to the CSPs being further advanced by the time of the final ENRD Assembly and EU CAP Network launch later this year. He underlined the potential opportunities for rural Europe from coordinated policy approaches that make best use of the CAP.</p>

Note: Presentations, documents and event summaries can be accessed and directly downloaded by clicking on the links provided