

NEWS AND UPDATES

- **THEMATIC WORK ON RURAL BUSINESSES**
- **NEW INTERACTIVE TOOLS FOR LAGs**
- **COMMUNICATION ON THE FUTURE OF FOOD AND FARMING**

RURAL ISSUES, RURAL PERSPECTIVES

- **CAN LEADER BE A CATALYST OF RURAL CONNECTIVITY?**
- **CHINA OPENS TO RURAL COOPERATION**
- **INAUGURAL EUROPEAN RURAL YOUTH PARLIAMENT**

FOCUS ON...

RURAL PROOFING**RURAL PROOFING**

- What impact on rural areas?*
- Scale of the impact?*
- How to tailor policies for rural areas?*

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 co-operation across rural Europe.

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

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

***Europe Direct is a service to help you find answers
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**Freephone number (*):
00 800 6 7 8 9 10 11**

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

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EDITORIAL



As we were putting this edition of the Rural Connections magazine together during the autumn, it was hard to avoid the metaphor of the harvest. We certainly had a bountiful crop of stories to choose from.

A seed that was planted some time ago is examined in depth in our **Focus on... Rural Proofing** (pp. 26-38) section. One year on from the Cork 2.0 Declaration, we felt it was time for an in-depth look at rural proofing. Highlighted in the Declaration, the concept is already well-known to some and it is primed to take root in a lot more places. We study the UK and Nordic approaches and the European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, Phil Hogan, and Guillaume Cros, member of the European Committee of the Regions, exclusively give us their visions for rural proofing – something both see as being very important to rural development in the future.

As ever, we have reached out to a range of stakeholders throughout the network in our **Rural Issues, Rural Perspectives** (pp. 14-25) section. One idea that continues to blossom is LEADER. We hear about a LAG mission to China and the ensuing cooperation that will follow. Local power is very much at the heart of community-led rural broadband initiatives, which are featured in another article. We also hear about a LAG initiative tackling mental health issues in rural areas. Looking beyond local, we also profile the major Agri Innovation Summit held in Lisbon, the PEGASUS research project, the first European Rural Youth Parliament and a comprehensive Family Farming Knowledge Platform run by the FAO.

Our regular round-up of **News and updates** (pp. 4-13) includes details of the CAP Communication on the Future of Food and Farming, the latest NRN meetings, and the ENRD's work on supporting rural businesses. In addition, we profile the European Evaluation Helpdesk's guidelines for evaluating LEADER/CLLD and the EIP-AGRI Service Point share a fascinating story on the use of digital technology.

We hope this crop of stories provide the inspiration and ideas needed for the coming winter months. Who knows, ideas being generated today may grow to become the rural development success stories of tomorrow. When that happens, we look forward to hearing all about it and reporting it back to the network.



Derek McGlynn

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NEWS & UPDATES

ENRD NEWS



Social inclusion and innovation on NRN agenda

The 9th meeting of the National Rural Networks (NRNs) in the 2014-2020 period took place on 15-17 November 2017 in Nicosia, Cyprus. Representatives from Network Support Units (NSUs), Local Action Groups (LAGs) and European organisations came together to discuss how to support social inclusion in rural areas. Specifically, participants identified innovative practices and discussed how the contribution of the Rural Development Programmes (RDs) to social inclusion objectives can be improved.

Additionally, the NRNs discussed joining up activities on thematic work, collection of good practices, and further to the previous NRNs' meeting – how to launch innovative networking tools with and through the ENRD.



© ENRD CP, 2017

The 8th NRNs' meeting (26-28 June 2017) held in the Jyväskylä region of Finland, discussed new networking tools and methods to support the implementation of the Cork 2.0 Declaration in RDP delivery.

The meeting used a methodology called 'Innovation Camp' to develop new ideas on the themes of innovation, communications, simplification, and rural proofing to take forward the work of the rural networks.

European Rural Networks' Steering Group

The Steering Group (SG) of the ENRD and EIP-AGRI networks met in May 2017 and again in October 2017.

The May meeting discussed and made proposals for the capacity-building activities and thematic work of the ENRD Contact Point and heard updates on the upcoming work of the Evaluation Helpdesk and EIP-AGRI Support Unit.

The October meeting focused on the outcomes of the rural networks' self-assessment and considered the implications of these findings for the future work of the networks.

Linking up Natura 2000 and the RDPs

An ENRD workshop in September 2017 explored ways of increasing complementarities between Natura 2000 and the RDPs through exchange of experience and good practice examples from across Europe. The event was jointly organised by the ENRD Contact Point and the European Commission's Directorate-Generals for Agriculture and Rural Development (DG AGRI) and Environment (DG ENV).

The discussions highlighted that RDP Measures linked to rural development Priority 4 – 'Restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems' – can be effectively used for nature conservation purposes.

 FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Outputs and presentations related to all events can be found at: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/past_en
All NRN-related content can be found at: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/networking_en

NEWS & UPDATES

Rural Development Priority and Focus Area summaries



Find out how the Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) will contribute to achieve the six Priorities of EU Rural Development policy and the related areas of intervention, the 18 Focus Areas.

The summaries provide aggregated information on the expected achievements and results, targets and interventions planned for each Priority and Focus Area (based on programme data as of March 2016).

https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/policy-in-action/rural-development-policy-figures/priority-focus-area-summaries_en

ENRD Contact Point team changes



The Contact Point has welcomed two new colleagues, **Flavio Conti** (left) and **Derek McGlynn** (right), to its Brussels team. Flavio joins the knowledge development group as a Policy Analyst and Derek joins the knowledge sharing group as Publications Manager.

Mike Gregory has taken over as Team Leader from **Paul Soto** – we wish Mike every success and patience. We warmly thank Paul for his work as Team Leader over the past three years and wish him inspiration in his new role as Senior Policy Expert. Paul will now concentrate more on the strategic direction of the CP with a particular focus on the topic of Smart Villages.

We bid a warm farewell to **Ed Thorpe** (Communications Manager) and wish him great success with his new professional horizons.

i FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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

Areas with Natural Constraints: FAQs

A set of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) providing insight into general and specific aspects of Areas Facing Natural or Other Specific Constraints (ANCs) – Rural Development Measure 13 is now available.

The FAQs include information on the designation of ANCs, the process of establishing ANC delimitations, biophysical criteria, fine-tuning, mountain areas, areas with specific constraints, and payment schemes.

https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/enrd/files/w11_anc_faqs.pdf

Agri-environment-climate Measures explained

A batch of AECM factsheets are now available. They overview the design and implementation of Agri-environment-climate Measures under the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and cover the following topics:

- Avoiding the risk of double funding;
- Finding solutions to control AECM support for input reductions;
- Collective approaches to AECM; and
- Result-based approaches to AECM.

https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/enrd-workshop-agri-environment-climate-measures_en

NEWS & UPDATES

Thematic work on Rural Businesses

The ENRD thematic work on Rural Businesses has delivered a set of useful outputs exploring how rural entrepreneurship can be supported to better access new markets and develop new forms of successful rural business both on and off-farm.

Work on this theme has involved the following main elements: meetings of the Thematic Group comprising various stakeholder representatives; an edition of both the EAFRD Projects Brochure and the EU Rural Review; and a European Seminar.

EAFRD PROJECTS BROCHURE 'SUPPORTING RURAL BUSINESS'



This edition explores how RDP funding – co-financed by the EAFRD – has been used not only to support individual businesses, but also to create the kind of enabling environment that allows businesses to prosper in rural areas.

The projects highlight inspiring examples of how to provide advice, training and networking

opportunities to rural businesses, as well as targeted investment in the digital and physical infrastructure needed by rural business, both on-farm and in other rural sectors of activity.

EU RURAL REVIEW 24 'RE-IMAGINING RURAL BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES'



EU Rural Review 24 explores some of the latest thinking and practice in how rural entrepreneurship can be supported to take advantage of emerging opportunities and latent potential in order to develop new forms of successful business.

It overviews new opportunities emerging from sectors ranging from the biotechnology to the experience

economy and from possibilities created by new information technologies to changing consumer demand. Finally, it examines how the RDPs can be deployed strategically to take advantage of these opportunities.

OTHER THEMATIC OUTPUTS

Additional outputs of the Thematic Group include:

- Practical case studies examining successful experiences with rural business accelerators, community broadband, and rural digital hubs;
- Analysis of 2014-2020 RDP support for rural businesses;
- Factsheets on social innovation and entrepreneurship, smart RDP support, digital hubs, and accelerators;
- Final Thematic Group report and summary factsheet.

ENRD SEMINAR

An ENRD Seminar on 'Revitalising Rural Areas through Business Innovation' brought together over 150 stakeholders in Brussels on 30 March 2017. The event examined a range of EU policies and tools for business innovation, including digitisation, smart specialisation, and social innovation. It showcased inspiring examples of rural business innovation and explored how such initiatives can be supported and extended through the RDPs.



FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Visit the Rural Businesses page on the ENRD website:
https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/thematic-work/smart-and-competitive-rural-areas/rural-businesses_en

NEWS & UPDATES

New ENRD thematic work

The ENRD Contact Point has launched two new Thematic Groups (TGs) which will be running from September 2017 to July 2018 to explore how to make the RDPs more effective in supporting 'Smart Villages' and the 'Sustainable Management of Water and Soils'. Both TGs had their first

and second meetings in October and December 2017, respectively.

The groups involve interested stakeholders and contribute to the broader ENRD thematic priorities of 'Smart and Competitive Rural Areas' and 'Greening the Rural Economy'.

A third thematic strand will continue exploring 'demographic change and social

inclusion in rural areas' with a topical workshop held in Cyprus on 16 November 2017 and another one planned for spring 2018.

Updates and outputs will be continuously uploaded on the respective pages in the Thematic Work section of the ENRD website.

A new Declaration for rural areas

The third European Rural Parliament (18-21 October 2017 – Venhorst, The Netherlands) resulted in the Venhorst Declaration, calling on "citizens and policy-makers to support the vitality of rural areas and to ensure that general policies and programmes are rural proofed."

Over 250 participants representing rural communities in 40 European countries advocated the creation of sustainable rural communities and a new era of bottom-up development in the following ways:

- Improving infrastructure, services and connectivity;
- Tackling poverty and social exclusion;
- Strengthening local economies;
- Welcoming new people into the community;
- Supporting rural youth;
- Boosting local development initiatives;
- Creation of a single Fund for Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) combining financial contributions from all European Structural Investment Funds.

The Declaration and an accompanying paper including detailed proposals on all of the above themes are intended to contribute to ongoing discussions on the post-2020 EU programmes and funds.


 FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Visit the website of the European Rural Parliament to find all relevant documents: <http://europeanruralparliament.com>

New LEADER/CLLD materials

LEADER TRANSNATIONAL COOPERATION (TNC) GUIDANCE

Updated ENRD guidance and practical tools provide a step-by-step overview of all the stages of a cooperation project: from project idea, through implementation, to evaluation and communication.

The materials explore topics such as: identifying TNC opportunities; selection criteria; legal structures for cooperation; preparatory actions; and provide summaries of relevant EU rules and guidance.

COOPERATION FACTSHEETS

How does LEADER/CLLD Cooperation work across European countries and regions? Find out what the rules and procedures are in the dedicated ENRD factsheets.

 FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Find all materials on the LEADER Cooperation web page: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader-clld/leader-cooperation_en

New interactive tools for LAGs

for effective networking and cooperation among Local Action Groups (LAGs)

The LAG database is continuously expanded to include the contacts of local groups operating under the Rural Development, Fisheries, Regional Development and Social Funds.

LAG Database

Search in the LAG Database

Total results: 32.

Country	LAG name	Main ESI Fund	Additional Funds	ESIF Programme
Belgium	GAL Pays des tiges et chavées	EAFRD	EMFF	Rural Development Programme - Wallonia
Belgium	GAL Condroz-Famenne	EAFRD		Rural Development Programme - Wallonia
Belgium	GAL Entre Sambre et Meuse	EAFRD		Rural Development Programme - Wallonia
Belgium	Parc Naturel des Plaines de l'Escaut	EAFRD	ESF	Rural Development Programme - Wallonia
Belgium	GAL Ardenne Méridionale	EAFRD		Rural Development Programme - Wallonia
Belgium	GAL Pays des Condruses	EAFRD	ERDF	Rural Development Programme - Wallonia
Belgium	Pays de Herve asbl	EAFRD		Rural Development Programme - Wallonia
Belgium	GAL Pays de l'Ourthe	EAFRD		Rural Development Programme - Wallonia
Belgium	GAL 100 Villages	EAFRD		Rural Development Programme - Wallonia

CURRENT SEARCH

32 LAGs found

- Belgium
- European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)

Clear filters

Country

- Belgium
- Austria (77)
- Bulgaria (40)
- Croatia (54)
- Cyprus (4)

Show more

ESI Fund

- European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)

ESIF Programme

- EAFRD (32)
 - Belgium (32)
 - Rural Development Programme -

Browse through hundreds of LAGs from across Europe

Each LAG has its **own profile web page** containing:

- contact details;
- information on the LAG area, strategy and funding;
- topics of interest for cooperation and project offers.

LAG Profile

GAL 100 Villages

LAG code: BE-001

Country: Belgium

Main ESI Fund: European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)

ESIF Programme: Rural Development Programme - Wallonia

Contact information

LAG email: leader@wfg.be

LAG manager: Gilbert Kuepper

LAG manager email: gilbert.kuepper@wfg.be

Address: Hauptstrabe 54 4780
4780 Saint-Vith Belgium

Additional information

LAG Funding

Cooperation details

Interested in future CLLD Cooperation?
Looking for a partner? Yes

Themes of interest for cooperation activities: Innovation, R&D

Contact name: Mr. John Doe
Johndoe[at]nordburgenland[dot]at

Cooperation offers

- > Training Course Agro youth
- > Historical Sites in Satakunta project
- > Franz Liszt network

LAG managers themselves can update information on their profile!

A linked CLLD Partner Search tool brings together cooperation offers and helps LAGs search and find potential project partners.



CLLD Partner Search

Search in the CLLD Partner Search Tool

Total results: 55.

Country	Offer name	Offering LAG	Project type	Expiry date
Germany	Franz Liszt network	Region an der Romantischen Straße	With other MSs (no shared border)	31-12-19
Latvia	Outdoor art	Association "Abula Rural Partnership" / "Abulas lauku partnerība"	Cross - border cooperation With other MSs (no shared border) Baltic	31-12-18
Croatia	Training Course - Agro youth	More 249	Across regions Cross - border cooperation Mediterranean	31-12-18
Belgium	Support for emerging regional permaculture networks	GAL Haute-Sure Forêt d'Anlier	Across regions Cross - border cooperation With other MSs (no shared border)	30-09-18
Poland	Clean natural environment as a base for improving quality of life	Lokalna Grupa Działania Ziemia Gotyku	Across regions Within the same region Cross - border cooperation With other MSs (no shared border) Baltic	30-06-18
Poland	The use of new technologies and know-how in rural areas	Stowarzyszenie Lokalna Grupa Działania "Razem dla Rozwoju"	With other MSs (no shared border)	30-06-18
France	Sustainable Rural Development	GAL Pays Ouest Charente - Pays du	With other MSs (no shared border)	01-06-18

Country

- ▶ Austria **1**
- ▶ Belgium **2**
- ▶ Croatia **1**
- ▶ Finland **9**
- ▶ France **11**

[Show more](#)

Topic of the project

- ▶ Innovation **21**
- ▶ Knowledge transfer / education / training activities **19**
- ▶ Tourism / Territorial branding **18**

Type of project

- ▶ Transnational cooperation **54**
- ▶ Cooperation within the MS **26**
- ▶ Sea basin cooperation **12**

LAG funded under

- ▶ European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) **54**
- ▶ European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) **2**

Search for cooperation offers and find project partners throughout Europe

Cooperation Offer

Offer name: Sustainable Rural Development
Expiry date: 01/06/2018
Offering LAG: GAL Pays Ouest Charente - Pays du Cognac
Country: France
Spoken languages: English - French

Looking for

Type of partner: Any EU area that have a production of wine or spirits.
Country(ies): European Union
Type of area: Inland, Lakes & rivers, Coastal, Mountainous, Peri-Urban, Urban, Small town, Historic centre, Segregated/deprived neighbourhood, Rural, Mediterranean, Atlantic
Assets of the area: High Nature Value, Cropland, Industry, Presence of relevant cultural sites, Protected areas

Contact this LAG *

Your organisation *

Your email *

Message *

* The information you provide will be directly forwarded to the LAG contact person.

Each cooperation offer includes a description of the project idea and the type of partner that is being sought.
If you are interested in one, you can contact the offering LAG directly!

LAG managers themselves can create and put cooperation offers online!

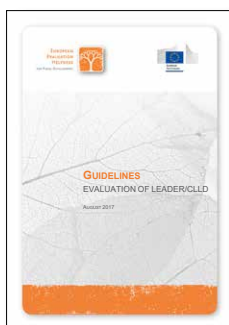
NEWS & UPDATES

UPDATE FROM THE EVALUATION HELPDESK

EUROPEAN
EVALUATION
HELPDESK
FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT



Supporting the Evaluation of LEADER/CLLD



The 2014–2020 programming period introduced the possibility to flexibly programme LEADER/CLLD in RDPs as well as new monitoring and evaluation requirements, which pose challenges to properly evaluate the effects of LEADER/CLLD at the EU, Member State, regional and local levels.

The requirements include complying with evaluation tasks, such as the assessment of the primary and secondary contributions of LEADER/CLLD to the achievements of policy objectives, RDP results and impacts, and the monitoring and evaluation of CLLD strategies.

For this reason, the European Evaluation Helpdesk for Rural Development has published a comprehensive non-binding guidance document, *Guidelines: Evaluation of LEADER/CLLD*, to assist stakeholders with not only evaluation, but also the reporting on LEADER/CLLD interventions. The guidelines focus exclusively on CLLD strategies funded by the EAFRD, i.e. LAGs funded only by the EAFRD. Practical advice is provided on how to prepare and conduct the evaluation of LEADER/CLLD when carried out either as a part of the RDP evaluation or when conducting an evaluation/self-assessment at the local level.

A MULTI-LEVEL APPROACH

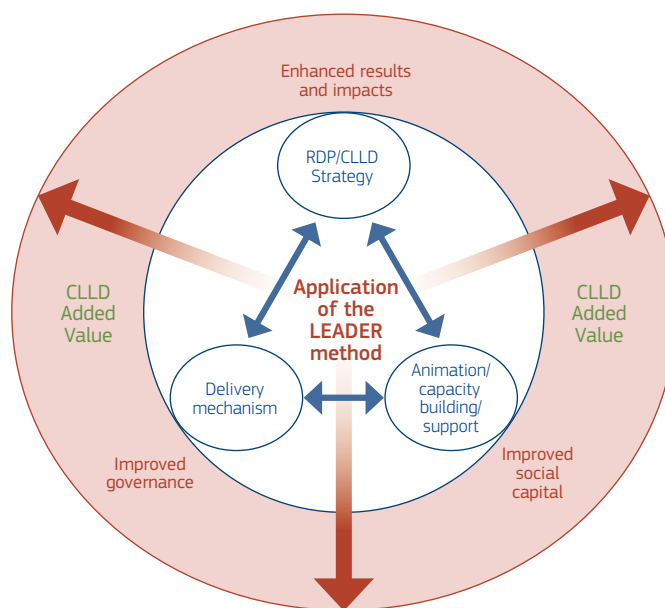
The guidelines are unique in that they provide a practical breakdown of how to approach and evaluate LEADER/CLLD at both the RDP and local levels. Readers will find an explanation of the evaluation cycle at the RDP level, which describes how to assess the contributions of LEADER/CLLD towards fulfilling objectives at the national and RDP levels. Furthermore, recommendations for LAGs on how to conduct non-mandatory evaluation activities or a self-assessment at the local level are provided. Additional information is provided on how Managing Authorities, National Rural Networks and other stakeholders may offer support to LAGs for this purpose.

LEADER/CLLD ADDED VALUE

The added value of LEADER/CLLD is in its ability, through the proper application of its method, to enhance social capital, governance, results and impacts (Figure 1). However, its added value is not easy to evaluate. For the first time, the guidelines provide a comprehensive conceptual framework for identifying and evaluating the added value of LEADER/CLLD in RDPs.⁽¹⁾

The **Guidelines: Evaluation of LEADER/CLLD** are available in all official EU languages in the Evaluation Helpdesk's eLibrary.

Figure 1: Added Value of LEADER/CLLD



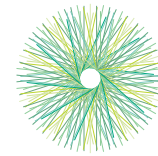
FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/evaluation_en
Guidelines Evaluation of LEADER/CLLD:
https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/evaluation/publications/evaluation-leadercld_en?pk_campaign=TWG3&pk_kwd=LEADER,%20CLLD

(1) The assessment of the added value of LEADER/CLLD is not mandatory, yet, it is very useful. It helps to understand what the EAFRD, if implemented through the LEADER method, is producing in addition to the effects that are generated through the regular way of implementing Rural Development Measures.

NEWS & UPDATES

UPDATE FROM EIP-AGRI

eip-agri
AGRICULTURE & INNOVATION

Shaping the digital (r)evolution in agriculture

Digital technologies support European farmers in providing safe, sustainable and quality food. Many are already using digital technologies – smartphones, in-field sensors or drones – for solutions such as remote measurement of soil conditions, better water management and livestock and crop monitoring. Data analysis can provide insights into likely future crop patterns or animal health and welfare that enable farmers to plan more effectively and be more efficient.

Hungarian farmer and veterinarian Dr. Gabor Salyi is one of the many European innovators that have seen how a clever precision livestock farming (PFL) tool can help them address challenges. He has been using a PLF tool developed by a Hungarian company that gives continuous real-time insight into dairy and beef herds' rumen conditions by checking

pH and temperature values. The PLF tool tells him at which rumen pH level milk production, quality and herd health can be optimised and it gives feedback on feed and farm management.

Every 10 minutes, a 13 cm bolus records the pH and temperature inside the rumsens of cows. Data gathered from herds in a number of countries worldwide is collected in the cloud so as to create added value from which farmers will benefit. As Dr. Salyi explains, together with the tool developer, "we have tested the system to

gain experience on how the obtained data can help discover and prevent the faults of feeding and management technologies."

The tool converts raw data into automated alerts for farmers. "With this tool, Sub-acute Ruminal Acidosis (SARA) can be detected early on, and may even be prevented," notes Dr. Salyi. As an expert adviser he has now joined forces with five Hungarian farms and a university, to reduce SARA in dairy farming and so to improve the productivity of Hungarian dairy farms.

 FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

For more information and inspiring examples read the EIP-AGRI brochure on the topic. <https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/en/publications/eip-agri-brochure-shaping-digital-revolution>



Food for innovative thought

The monthly **EIP-AGRI digital newsletter** provides all the latest information on the events, publications and networking possibilities regarding innovation in agriculture and forestry. Subscribe via www.eip-agri.eu.

The 2017 edition of **Agrinnovation magazine** is focused on food production and short supply chains. It serves up inspirational stories from across Europe, an update on Operational Groups, and more news and fresh ideas from the EIP-AGRI Network.

 FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Download a digital copy or order a paper copy on the EIP-AGRI website:

<https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/en/publications/agrinnovation-magazine-issue-n%C2%B0-4-september-2017>

<https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/en/content/order-your-copy-agrinnovation-magazine-%E2%80%93-issue-4>

NEWS & UPDATES

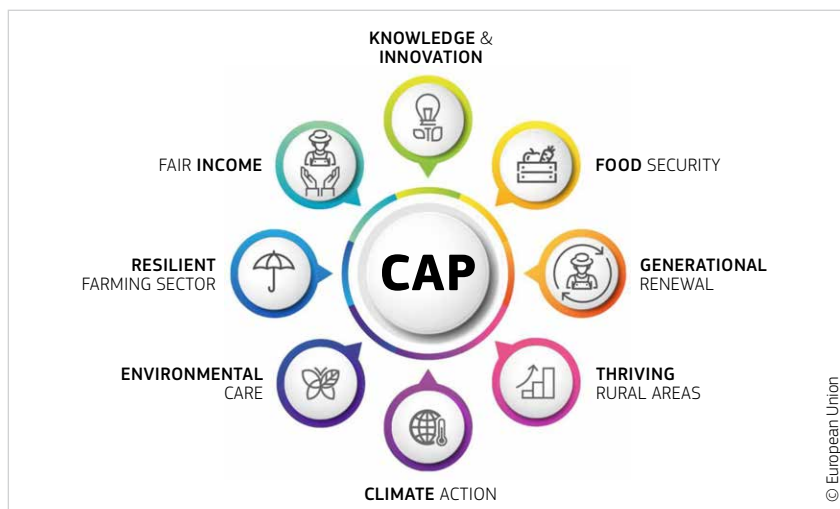
EU NEWS

Communication on the Future of Food and Farming

The European Commission published on 29 November 2017 a Communication on the Future of Food and Farming – for a flexible, fair and sustainable Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

The document outlines a more flexible approach to ensure that the CAP delivers results in supporting farmers and leads the sustainable development of EU agriculture. It lays the ground for a new implementation system, paving the way for a more results-based approach to the CAP.

The Communication proposes a shift from a one-size-fits-all to a more flexible approach placing greater responsibilities on Member States to choose how and where to invest their CAP funding in order to meet European goals on smart and resilient agriculture, environment, climate change, the socio-economic fabric of rural areas, and innovation.



Additionally, the document lays out proposals for increased use of modern technologies, support for young farmers, health, nutrition, food waste, animal welfare, risk management, and coherent action with policies on trade, migration and development.

The Commission will put forward legislative proposals giving effect to the goals outlined in the Communication before the summer of 2018.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Find the full text of the Communication and related press release, memo and factsheets: http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-17-4841_en.htm

Explore a collection of resources on the 'Future of CAP' compiled by the research service of the AGRI committee of the European Parliament: <https://research4committees.blog/2017/11/30/futureofcap/>

Agriculture and farming online tools

A selection of some interesting free online tools and resources related to agriculture and farming:

- A **database** by the Horizon 2020 project SIMRA collects good practice examples of **social innovation** in agriculture, forestry and rural development in marginalised rural areas.
- A **platform** by the Horizon 2020 thematic network OK-Net Arable facilitates exchange of knowledge on **organic farming** techniques among European farmers, advisors and scientists.
- **E-learning courses** by the Horizon 2020 project INNO-4-AGRIFOOD train agri-food small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and consultants in online **collaboration for innovation**.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

SIMRA database: <http://www.simra-h2020.eu/index.php/simradatabase/>
 OK-Net Arable platform: <http://farmknowledge.org/>
 INNO-4-AGRIFOOD courses: <http://inno4agrifood.eu/e-training>

NEWS & UPDATES

European young farmers in the spotlight

The results of an EU-wide survey among young farmers have highlighted fair income, access to land, and simplification of administrative procedures as key conditions for them to develop their farms in economically and environmentally sustainable ways. The survey was carried out by the European Council of Young Farmers (CEJA) in partnership with DeLaval between April and August 2017.

The results of the survey were presented at a dedicated event held at the European Parliament on 27 September 2017 in Brussels, which brought together young farmers and European policy-makers to discuss what is necessary to achieve a more sustainable agricultural sector.

The main findings of the survey relating to the needs of young farmers in Europe coincide with those of the ENRD Contact Point ongoing thematic work on Generational Renewal. The CP will continue to identify how the RDPs can best support young farmers and other new entrants to the sector, facilitate cooperation and exchange, and collect useful information and resources on the topic.



FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Find the 'European young farmers' survey results at:
<http://www.ceja.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/CEJA-DeLaval-Survey-European-Young-Farmers.pdf>

Visit the 'Generational Renewal' page in the Thematic Work section of the ENRD website.

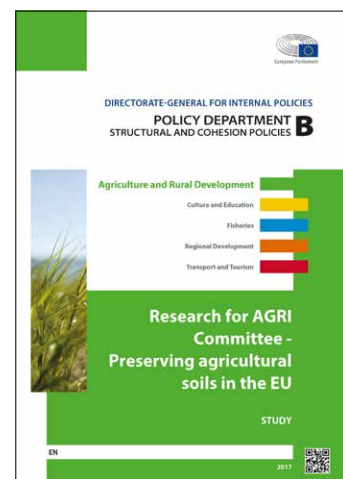
EU guides and publications



A publication compiling practical information on launching bottom-up initiatives in rural areas to support the take-up and implementation of the LEADER approach in the Western Balkans, Turkey and beyond.



A briefing covering the current state of risk management in EU agriculture, including drivers, perceptions and responses, as well as instruments to prevent, mitigate or cope with agricultural risk.



A study of threats to soil and its related services, and the link to agricultural soil management. Includes threat mitigation ideas and a set of policy recommendations.

ISBN 978-92-846-0955-0

RURAL ISSUES, RURAL PERSPECTIVES

Helping mountain areas deliver ecosystem services

Marie Clotteau and Lauren Mosdale

Euromontana wants to see long-lasting improvements in the provision of ecosystem services through farming and forestry in mountain areas. The association is part of PEGASUS – a European Horizon 2020 research project – where it can share and learn from the latest thinking.



SUPPORTING MOUNTAIN AREAS

Mountain ecosystems cover 29% of Europe's area: around 40% of this land is forested and the ecosystems host 15% of Europe's utilised agricultural areas. The ecosystems deliver numerous environmental and social benefits of great added value, such as food and timber production, climate regulation, air quality and flood regulation.

For instance, between 30% and 60% of lowland waters come from mountain areas in Europe and 14% of mountain areas are classified as Natura 2000 network sites. Despite this, ecosystem services are under pressure due to increasing pasture abandonment, climate change and soil erosion.

PEGASUS KNOW-HOW

At Euromontana, we want to increase the provision of environmental and social services from mountain areas. We are participating in the PEGASUS research project, which is developing new ways of thinking about farmland and forest management in pursuit of the EU2020 vision of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

Coordinated by the Institute for European Environmental Policy, the project is examining how governance arrangements, collective action, private sector involvement and policy can be improved. Some 34 case studies are exploring the links between the provision of environmental and social benefits and the way stakeholders and the private sector can be engaged, the farming and forestry systems used and the available policy support schemes.

It was particularly interesting to understand how public funding schemes were needed when the market

mechanisms were insufficient to ensure adequate provision of public goods and to see the ways in which the various actors organise themselves.

For example, the organic mountain hay-milk branding strategies in the Murau district (Austria) combined a private sector initiative with CAP Measures (notably, Areas facing Natural Constraints and Agri-environment-climate) to enable extensive forms of agriculture in mountain areas to be economically more viable, thereby reducing the threat of farm abandonment.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Project partners have identified some preliminary findings. For instance, taking a territorial approach can create the right framework to encourage more interest in collective action. Collective initiatives frequently generate greater engagement by farmers, foresters and other land managers to deliver environmental results over the longer term.

Aligning public policies and market drivers has emerged as critical in many initiatives and those synergies should be encouraged more actively at the European and more local levels. A final PEGASUS conference, scheduled for early 2018, will crystallise the preliminary findings into actionable policy recommendations.

Marie Clotteau is the Director and **Lauren Mosdale** is the Project Officer of Euromontana, the European association of mountain areas.
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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Euromontana: www.euromontana.org
PEGASUS: <http://pegasus.ieep.eu>

RURAL ISSUES, RURAL PERSPECTIVES

Can LEADER be a catalyst of rural connectivity?

Jan Dröge

Local communities are increasingly taking steps to provide high-speed internet access in their areas where commercial operators have failed to deliver on broadband roll-out. How can locally led innovation and EU broadband funding come together to achieve universal connectivity?



Jan Dröge, Director of the Broadband Competence Offices Support Facility (BCO-SF).

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RURAL BROADBAND SHORTFALL

The LEADER programme was set up as a community initiative to capture and harness the energy and creativity of local communities for the benefit of rural development. This recipe has been successful in inspiring community-led initiatives, supported by EU funding. Could it now be a driver of broadband roll-out in rural areas?

Over the last two programming periods, the European Structural and Investment Funds have allocated close to €10 billion to broadband roll-out. In the 2007-2013 period, a significant proportion of these funds went unclaimed, while connectivity in rural and mountainous areas remains significantly below the EU average, and worryingly far from the official targets of universal connectivity.

Broadband roll-out in the EU is generally in the hands of private telecoms operators who naturally tend to focus on geographic areas that yield the best return on investment. Typically, these are where population density and incomes are higher, where there is a dense ecosystem of economic actors and where the geographic landscape is not a challenge to investment. Islands, rural, remote and mountainous areas particularly suffer from underinvestment in broadband access.

The good news is that in recent years, several local communities have taken steps to provide high-speed internet access in their areas. In this article, we focus

on three such initiatives that demonstrate how locally led innovation and EU broadband funding can come together to help achieve universal connectivity.

BROADBAND FOR THE RURAL NORTH

Broadband for the Rural North (B4RN) is an initiative that emerged in Lancashire (UK) where rural communities could not get established telecom operators to invest in their area. A group of citizens started a cooperative whose business model is built on a 100% coverage target.

It means that if a village is connected by the B4RN network, all the houses in the area are included, even if they are located far from the main access roads. Irrespective of the variable connection cost, B4RN charges the same fee to each household.



The three key elements of B4RN's success are community-initiated, community-implemented and technical quality.

The response has been impressive. With an uptake rate of over 62%, it means that nearly two-thirds of residents pay the monthly subscription to get the faster internet access. This is an important indicator of demand and it undermines some telecoms companies' assumption that only a small proportion of potential customers will pay for the faster service in rural areas.

From the outset, B4RN opted for 'best in class' internet: its network subscribers' internet speeds far exceed the commercial offering in most cities in Europe.

Despite the challenges of rural roll-out and despite the deliberate choice to go for high-end service, B4RN has been profitable. It has grown from the original 100 households in 2011 to over 3000 households. Interestingly, B4RN was implemented without any public funding and the organisation re-invests its profits in the community.

Faster than NASA

B4RN notes the three key elements to their success as being: community-initiated; community-implemented; and technical quality.

Community-initiated means that, from the start, the scheme was planned to meet the needs of the local users. It was also a way for local residents to take ownership of their situation.

B4RN relied on the active participation of residents in the implementation of the project. Broadband roll-out in Europe is expensive mainly because of the cost of deploying the cables. Through involvement of local volunteers, these costs were significantly lowered than for a commercial company. This local community role also significantly facilitated the access rights needed to dig trenches and lay cables.

The success of B4RN is also due to its quality-based approach. The decision to go for 1 Gbps connections, which are, "faster than NASA," as stated by B4RN, certainly gave the users an incentive to buy into the service and guaranteed the sustainability of the project by avoiding the trap of "low quality DIY networks".

BÜRGERBREITBANDNETZ

In 2014, citizens in Schleswig Holstein, northern Germany, set up an investment company to build their own network, when neither the established telecom operator, nor other operators wanted to improve connectivity in the area.

The initiative, called BürgerBreitbandNetz (BBNG), is run as a company, though the board is composed of local citizen representatives and mayors. It successfully fundraised, attracting investment from citizens, local banks and businesses, and, most notably, wind parks. The resulting capital has been invested in infrastructure.

A key feature of BBNG is that it started with a full assessment of the demand from local citizens through consultation. The plan was to connect villages where at least 62% of residents would subscribe. The response has been overwhelmingly favourable, with uptake varying from 82% to 95%. This early engagement with users created the demand necessary to proceed with the investment. The initiative has grown from 3000 households in 2014 to target over 6000 households by 2017.

The close dialogue with citizens, the inclusion of local business actors, and the mobilisation of capital through local investment banks are key to the success of BBNG.

LEADER CONNECTIVITY

These examples show that community networks and the initiative of local actors are the key to success. We see a real potential for LEADER and the Local Action Groups (LAGs) to act as catalysts to get such initiatives off the ground. LEADER has 20 years of experience in community-led innovation and a network in all rural areas that is second to none. This unique combination of network experience and seed funding could represent a very potent driver for community-led initiatives to improve connectivity throughout rural Europe.

Windmill towers of 80m allowed the installation of 4G antennas that helped to produce a very wide coverage with acceptable speeds for the community benefit.



© ASNET

ASNET WIRELESS BROADBAND

Jes Jessen, ASNET Manager



It all began when a local farm, on the Asnaes peninsula near Kalundborg in Denmark, opened an online shop selling organic food. Unfortunately, the bandwidth speeds meant that the business was struggling. The farmer offered to fund cable roll-out at his own expense, but his offers were ignored and political contacts proved fruitless.

We realised that we had to do something ourselves.

We arranged a community meeting to present the idea of setting up a project with local user funding and supplemental funds coming from other sources, at the time unknown. We heard about LEADER providing funds for rural growth, including broadband projects, so with that in mind, we began to see light at the end of the tunnel.

Telecom operators were contacted and one fibre network operator sent a quotation, but the cost (€4 000) per household was much too high.

We realised that a less ambitious but a more realistic solution could be wireless broadband using the emerging 4G network. Obstacles emerged: raising enough masts carrying 4G transmitters would not only be costly, but also create a long legal and administrative battle with the Ministry of Environmental Affairs and local development restrictions.

At the time, a windmill park was being established on the fields of a local farm. The windmill towers are 80m tall and installing 4G antennas 70m up would produce a very wide coverage with acceptable speeds for the community benefit. Ninety five percent of the households contributed by investing €400 each, the telecom operator agreed to provide equipment and LEADER provided 50% of the budget.

The ASNET now provides wireless broadband and mobile phone connectivity. As of 2017, more than 150 households are connected.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

LEADER/CLLD:
https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader-clld_en

Broadband Competence Offices:
<https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/broadband-competence-offices>

RURAL ISSUES, RURAL PERSPECTIVES

China opens to rural cooperation

Petri Rinne

European LEADER Local Action Groups undertook a mission to China in March. The inspiring visit was intended to open cooperation opportunities between European and Chinese rural territories, as well as to introduce the idea of LEADER style bottom-up rural development in China. As a result of the successful mission, a Memorandum of Understanding is being developed.



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A MISSION OF RURAL FRIENDSHIP

Our delegation consisted of LEADER groups from Estonia, Poland and Finland that are launching rural tourism cooperation with Chinese rural counties as well as with R&D organisations, rural businesses and education institutions. Our host organisation was the State Administration of Foreign Experts Affairs (SAFEA), a governmental body in charge of foreign expert exchange in the country, aiming to improve know-how and encourage growth from sectors ranging from agriculture to the airplane industry.

General Director Xia Bing of the China Association for International Exchange of Personnel, an implementing body of SAFEA's, explained that experts are invited from all over the world based on the needs identified by the central government and the 30 provinces.

Xia Bing noted that both the LEADER rural development method and SAFEA utilise a cross-sectoral approach focusing not only on agriculture, but looking at the whole rural picture, for example including the processing industry, services, community development and so on. Rural tourism development will have a strong focus in China in the coming years. He noted that SAFEA was interested in launching a pilot project using the LEADER method with ELARD, saying that a 'Chinese-EU Rural Friendship Association,' could be established to help promote cooperation.

GREEN TEA & TOURISM

After the meetings in Beijing, we visited the green tea counties of Pujiang and Hongya in the Sichuan province, some 2000km south-west of Beijing. This part of

Sichuan has major rural tourism potential due to its mountain views, tea culture, panda bear population, but the small-scale, farm-level tourism investments are only at the very beginning. Here the exchange with European rural tourism territories could make a big impact, while also allowing the EU territories to open their markets to Chinese tourists.

Interestingly, Finland has a gateway position in international air traffic to China, and our flight operator Finnair is among the top foreign flight operators in the Chinese market. This has resulted in a rapid increase of Chinese tourists in the country, and studies show that the Chinese average expenditure during their holidays is significant.

Our last stop was Ningbo city that is home to 12 million people on the east coast of China, south of Shanghai. The region has a special growth and innovation area status due to the pace of its development and internationalisation, including in terms of foreign investment. The 7000-year old Ningbo city today has the world's busiest cargo port, shipping 920 million tonnes annually.

The surrounding countryside offered a strong contrast with poorer Sichuan. There was a shortage of arable land in the area. Due to this land privatisation, other ways of making agriculture more efficient have been pioneered. For example, hybrid rice now offers 1 000 kg crops from traditional 600m² plots.

The 'city of culture and a gateway to the world' also attracts 1.7 million tourists to the region every year. The aims of the Ningbo rural development strategy include: tidying up of villages; constructing municipal water and waste water pipelines and cleaning systems for the villages; improving housing conditions; supporting



© Petri Rinne

The LAGs' mission is opening cooperation opportunities between European and Chinese rural territories.

cultural traditions; and selecting and promoting model villages to showcase. The Ningbo city area has more than 2 500 village communities whose populations vary between 200 and 1 000 families.

We had a chance to visit two very different types of model village close to Ningbo: Golden Moth village (direct translation from Chinese) where villagers had built a new, modern housing area offering every family a luxurious 300m² twin house apartment for living and Green Cloud village where the same three family clans had lived for centuries and were protecting and maintaining their cultural heritage and the labyrinth of their old housing area.

JOINT PROJECTS

It became very evident during the mission that Chinese central government officials have a strong interest in cooperating with European rural territories for mutual benefit. LEADER bottom-up development principles, as well as the aims for grassroots level empowerment and capacity building fit very well with the Chinese rural reform objectives.

The European LEADER Association for Rural Development (ELARD) is now in the process of preparing and signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with SAFEA. It would outline the objectives and means for knowledge

and expert exchange, as well as for inter-territorial cooperation projects. The MoU will be the first concrete step in opening a new cooperation platform with one of the fastest developing economic and cultural giants in the world.

The development of Chinese rural territories is now strongly in focus and there remain many unrealised opportunities. In concrete terms, the Chinese have already proposed a rural, secondary airport logistics project with European rural territories that is in partner search stage. A SAFEA delegation also visited DG AGRI and the ENRD to discuss migration issues in June 2017.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

ELARD: <http://www.elard.eu>

SAFEA: <http://en.safea.gov.cn>

RURAL ISSUES, RURAL PERSPECTIVES

Summit gathers dynamic agri-innovation actors

Edina Ocsko

More than 500 farmers, rural businesses, start-ups, Rural Development Programme (RDP) Managing Authorities, National Rural Networks, researchers, advisors and NGOs were in Lisbon for the 1st edition of the Agri Innovation Summit.



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INNOVATION AGENDA

The great and the good from the field of innovation in Europe were in Lisbon on 11-12 October 2017 for the Agri Innovation Summit 2017 (AIS 2017).

A joint initiative of a Portuguese consortium, the Portuguese Government, the EIP-AGRI network and the ENRD, the largescale event had three principle aims.

The first was to promote cross-fertilisation between multi-actor innovation initiatives, both under the RDPs and Horizon 2020. Secondly, AIS 2017 was about raising awareness of the opportunities which innovation and digitisation can bring for agriculture and rural economies and how these may be supported under the ongoing RDPs. Finally, the ideas generated at the event will

provide input to the development of EU innovation policies for agriculture and rural areas after 2020, in line with Point 7 'Boosting Knowledge and Innovation' of the Cork 2.0 Declaration.

On day one, parallel thematic sessions presented a range of inspiring initiatives on the themes of: resource use (adaptation to and mitigation of climate change); management of farming, food and forestry systems and valorisation of the territory; and agriculture 4.0 and rural development. On the second day, eight workshops were held. Several ENRD Contact Point team members facilitated the workshop discussions on how to enable rural areas to benefit from current and emerging innovation and digital opportunities.



Kari Kylkilahti
LAG, Finland

The ENRD asked stakeholders for their takeaways from AIS 2017 and how they would foster innovation and digitisation in agriculture and rural areas.

The Summit had ambitious goals and the scale of the event was impressive. Cooperation between research and hands-on development is crucial. It makes sense to learn from other countries and sectors. I personally found interesting how much importance was put on rural micro businesses and small farms, but we must not forget NGOs either.



Emilija Stojmenova
Ljubljana University, Slovenia

The main added value was networking. Getting feedback about our work from such a diverse group of people was very beneficial for our future activities.

The main message I took was that it is crucial we collaborate, share ideas, knowledge and resources on local, regional and European levels. It is very important we use existing resources and ecosystems and build on those.

KEY MESSAGES

The workshops on Smart Villages, Promoting innovation in rural areas, Improving connectivity in rural areas, and Digital opportunities for rural businesses and communities were especially relevant for rural networkers.

A common challenge identified was the fragmented nature of funding and governance systems, resulting in uncertainties for

stakeholders about where to go for funding. Strategic planning for the development of rural areas needs to start from the bottom up. Innovative approaches need a flexible support framework, allowing the combination of different measures and 'fast track' financing.

To help make **Smart Villages** a reality, the workshop concluded that supporting rural services through social and digital innovation in areas such as health, education and mobility would be beneficial.

Key recommendations

- **Better targeting and coordination:** bottom-up strategic planning & rural proofing of all policies.
- **Support for pilot initiatives:** linking up across Europe.
- **Enabling LEADER and other local initiatives:** providing the full range of support required for emerging projects.

The **Promoting innovation in rural areas** workshop emphasised that innovative, flexible and integrated business-support systems are crucial for new businesses.

Key recommendations

- **Complete 'package deal':** not only business support but also social services and infrastructure for businesses.
- **Non-agricultural advisory:** ensure that advisory services are provided to a wider range of businesses.
- **Embrace risk:** need to understand possible risks and effects of interventions (including right measurement and indicators).

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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

Smart Villages: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/smart-and-competitive-rural-areas/smart-villages_en

Agri Innovation Summit 2017: <http://aislisbon2017.com>

https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/agricultural-innovation-summit_en

Alistair Prior

Scottish Rural Network Support Unit



I can now see the linkages between projects and the potential opportunities of bringing these projects together with policy-makers and practitioners to ensure that there is a meaningful legacy for them, particularly in the context of innovation and bridging the digital divide. This is a great opportunity for our new Innovation Support Service to be proactive in linking EIP, LEADER and Horizon 2020 initiatives and strengthening partnership working both horizontally and vertically.

Christiane Kirketerp

European Commission, DG AGRI



It was great to see the strong interest in the burgeoning Smart Villages concept. I certainly also got some clear messages about things that can be improved. This concerns the level of bureaucracy for beneficiaries, the need to simplify and harmonise EU funding rules, the consistent problems of underinvestment in rural infrastructure and the fact that we need to further develop our Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems to fully unleash the innovation potential of our farmers and rural communities.

RURAL ISSUES, RURAL PERSPECTIVES

FAO Family Farming Knowledge Platform

The FAO's Family Farming Knowledge Platform is the world's leading web reference on family farming and a welcome legacy of the 2014 International Year of Family Farming.



Article prepared by the **FFKP Team**, Partnerships and South-South Cooperation Division (DPS), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

FAMILY FARMING IS THE NORM

Family farming is the predominant form of agriculture both in developed and in developing countries. With over 500 million family farms in the world, family farmers range from smallholder to medium-scale farmers. This includes peasants, indigenous peoples, traditional communities, fisher folks, mountain farmers, pastoralists and many other groups representing every region and biome of the world. Across the EU, family farms account for around 19 farms out of 20.

Family farms run diversified agricultural systems and preserve traditional food products, contributing both to a balanced diet and to safeguarding the world's agro-biodiversity. Family farmers are embedded in territorial networks and local cultures, and spend their incomes mostly within local and regional markets, generating many agricultural and non-agricultural jobs. All the above characteristics mean that family farmers hold the unique potential to move towards more productive and sustainable food systems if policy environments support them in this path.

A NEW KNOWLEDGE PLATFORM

During the 2014 International Year of Family Farming, FAO's stakeholders expressed the need for a knowledge platform that could share information on key topics related to family farming across the world.

The result was the FAO's Family Farming Knowledge Platform (FFKP). Launched in June 2015, the user-friendly online resource provides high-quality information on family farming from around the world, covering national laws and regulations, public policies, best practices, relevant data and statistics, research, articles and publications.

The FFKP has grown to become a worldwide reference which facilitates informed decision-making on family

farming policy processes. It also helps to raise awareness of the enormous contribution that family farming makes to addressing some of the most pressing challenges we face today, such as food security and the needs of sustainable food systems that preserve natural resources in times of climate change.

In addition, the FFKP allows its worldwide contributors and focal points from national governments to collaborate. Currently, the platform includes more than 100 focal points appointed by their governments and another 100 contributors worldwide.

Contributors and focal points therefore play a vital role in this project, since they are not only FFKP users, but they also regularly feed the database with updated and relevant material. Two years since its launch, the FFKP now has more than 17 000 documents and has already been visited by approximately 170 000 users.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Family Farming Knowledge Platform:
www.fao.org/family-farming/en/

EU Rural Review - Issue 17 - Family Farming:
https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/publications/eu-rural-review_en

RURAL ISSUES, RURAL PERSPECTIVES

Mad about farming

Julie Mariën

A new Belgian LEADER project – ‘Mad about farming’ – is raising awareness of mental health issues in the Flemish farming community.



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FARMERS UNDER PRESSURE

“Our company has been dogged by misfortune time after time: poisonings, floodings and illnesses. It left us with a huge financial hangover. At the moment things are getting better, but the stress remains. Sometimes we succeed in paying our monthly payments, sometimes we don’t. If we don’t, we are still at risk of getting into a new crisis or of having a bailiff standing at our doorstep.”

This testimony comes from Karine, a 46-year old Flemish farmer. She is not the only farmer in Flanders in need of help. In such cases, the stress levels can lead to psychological problems. However, for some farmers, it is not easy to talk about their problems. Culturally, it can still be taboo. Or some farmers simply don’t have someone in their network to talk to about these issues.

‘Boeren op een kruispunt’ (‘Farmers at a crossroads’) is an organisation which helps farmers and horticulturalists who are in need. The organisation targets preventative measures, awareness raising about psychological support and policy work.

Over the years, the volunteers of ‘Farmers at a crossroads’ have come to realise that the world of agriculture and horticulture and the world of social and psychological aid are insufficiently aware of one another. Psychologists aren’t sufficiently aware of the problems farmers face and the kind of work they do. Likewise, farmers often don’t know how to access psychological help.

BOOSTING MENTAL HEALTH

Farmers at a crossroad have therefore started a LEADER project called ‘Mad about farming’ to help resolve this dichotomy. The project’s aim is to bring mental health



© Zot van 't Boeren

The project will build a network of volunteers – ‘Fans of farmers’ – who can talk with farmers about their problems and inform them about appropriate professional assistance.

services and the agricultural and horticultural sectors closer together.

This project has identified four challenges. It wants to make problems more open for discussion; it wants to develop a network of volunteers (it is called ‘Fans of farmers’); it wants to encourage a greater signalling role for those who visit farmers regularly – such as veterinarians, farm advisors, suppliers and so on; and it wants to enhance collaboration with the mental health network.

A farmer’s direct environment is crucial to detecting problems early. By making some time for a chat and supporting a farmer under stress, friends, family or neighbours can make a world of difference. The project notes that over the past couple of years such contacts have been diluted. To tackle this problem, the project will build a network of volunteers (the aforementioned ‘Fans of farmers’) who can talk with farmers about their problems, and who can inform farmers about the appropriate professional assistance they could benefit from.

 FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

‘Mad about farming’ project:
www.zotvantboeren.be

RURAL ISSUES, RURAL PERSPECTIVES

Inaugural European Rural Youth Parliament

Āris Ādlers

Young people from the European Union and neighbouring countries gathered in Latvia in August 2017 to participate in the first ever European Rural Youth Parliament.



Āris Ādlers, member of the board of the European Rural Community Alliance and the Latvian Rural Forum.
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FROM FAR AND WIDE

All paths led to Ratnieki, located about 65km from Riga, in the beautiful Gauja National Park for the first ever European Rural Youth Parliament (ERYP). Around 90 representatives from Albania, Armenia, Austria, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Norway, Moldova, Slovenia, Switzerland and the UK participated in the gathering, which was held on 11 August 2017.

Schools and youth groups from around Europe were invited to be part of the ERYP process. A survey completed prior to the event helped collect data and case studies that provided a picture of the current issues affecting young people. European and Latvian rural development experts also contributed their knowledge to the ERYP.

The parliament was designed to address the challenges of the 21st century rural youth in an interactive manner. The ensuing debate sought to identify the necessary conditions to allow young people to successfully develop their ideas – business, cultural or social. Afterwards, the ideas on how to create the right conditions were elaborated.

Ultimately, a person's choice to remain in a rural area must not be an impediment to personal and professional fulfilment. The new generation in rural areas should be equally able to access the social and economic benefits of global trends, such as digitisation, as their urban counterparts.

EUROPEAN SPIRIT

The day kicked off with some warm-up activities that allowed the participants to share their hopes about the future of rural areas. Following speeches from representatives of Rural Youth Europe, the European Rural Parliament movement and the Latvian Rural Forum, a specially developed methodology was used to structure the ERYP debate.

The participants were divided into working groups and welcomed to Airberg – an imaginary rural village whose youthful inhabitants had similar aspirations and challenges as their rural contemporaries around Europe. Working from a series of case studies, the members of the youth parliament engaged in targeted discussions about how they should develop Airberg.

In the 'Youth voice' session participants developed ideas from the point of view of a young person looking to develop their dreams in a rural setting. Each working group developed three or more main ideas. The final session provided the opportunity to look at rural challenges from the perspective of different sectors. The objective was to find concrete actions that could implement the ideas developed in the previous sessions, be they at a local, national or European level.





The first ever European Rural Youth Parliament sought to identify the necessary conditions to allow young people to successfully develop their ideas – business, cultural or social.

ERYP METHODOLOGY

The parliament debate was structured around a methodology comprising three key elements:

1. Observation of interest in social and economic issues;
2. Development of solutions tackling the realities of rural youth;
3. A decision-making process to identify actions needed at local, national and international levels.

EUROPEAN RURAL MANIFESTO

One of the objectives of the ERYP was to raise awareness of the European Rural Manifesto. The manifesto was issued following the 2nd European Rural Parliament (November 2015).

It highlights that rural people have a responsibility to act towards their own well-being, but demands that governments at all levels, including at European level, work to make this crucial partnership effective.

The Manifesto campaign is designed to influence

the preparation of European policies related to rural areas for the period beyond 2020.

LINK TO THE EUROPEAN RURAL PARLIAMENT

The European Rural Parliament is a long-term campaign to express the voice of rural people in Europe and to promote self-help and action by rural people, in partnership with civil society and governments.

Since the European Rural Parliament was held in 2015, a concerted effort has been made to include the voice of rural youth in the debate. This shared goal provided the impetus to organise the first ever European Rural Youth Parliament.

The ERYP was organised by the association Latvian Rural Forum, Latvian 4H, Rural Youth Europe and the Village Action Association of Finland (SYTY).

The outputs of the ERYP were used to inform the preparation of the European Rural Parliament held in October 2017 in Venhorst, the Netherlands.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

European Rural Parliament:
www.europeanruralparliament.com
Latvian Rural Forum: <http://llf.partneribas.lv/lv>

Latvian 4H: www.mazpulki.lv
Rural Youth Europe: www.ruralyoutheurope.com
SYTY: www.kylatoiminta.fi

A FOCUS ON... RURAL PROOFING

INTRODUCTION

Is rural proofing the key that unlocks rural development?

The concept of rural proofing is gaining political momentum at national and European levels. This edition of Rural Connections examines why many think it has such potential for rural development and focuses on what rural proofing entails in practice. Whatever your opinion, expect to hear a lot more about it.

The Cork 2.0 Declaration marks a fundamental shift in how rural areas are perceived. Rural areas are now being framed as potential solutions to societal challenges. To fulfill this new role, certain conditions will have to be met and this is where working in synergy with other policies becomes especially important.

For example, years of investments in creating jobs in local businesses can be wiped out when the decision is taken to close a local school. At the very least, policies must pull in the same direction to ensure that rural areas fulfil their potential. This is doubly important at times like the present, when public budgets are under severe pressure and scrutiny. In this context, rural proofing can be a powerful tool for getting value for money and ensuring that policies reinforce one another to achieve the maximum benefit for all areas and that unintended negative effects of other policies on rural areas are avoided.

The Cork 2.0 Declaration has given rural proofing a fresh impetus at the European level. Countries such as Finland and the UK have already been using rural proofing to enhance their Rural Development policy for

some time. Others, such as Sweden, are putting into place new legislation which is expected to embed the idea into practice. The ENRD is also excited by the potential of rural proofing. At the 8th National Rural Networks' (NRNs) Meeting in Finland (June 2017), a workshop gathered NRNs who are interested in exploring how the tool can best be implemented in their specific contexts.

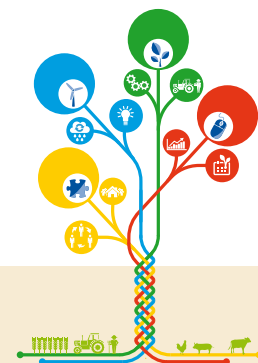
So, what is rural proofing and what are the reasons for this renewed interest? This section gets to the heart of the matter by putting the spotlight on the Nordic and UK experiences and speaking to practitioners who know how rural proofing works in practice.

Interviews with European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development Phil Hogan and with Guillaume Cros, the European Committee of the Regions' rapporteur on CAP reform, reveal their

Rural proofing is an attempt to ensure that all policy areas take rural issues into consideration.

respective ambitious visions for rural proofing. As the Commissioner notes, "rural proofing can help promote solutions that benefit rural jobs and growth or better access to basic services."

In addition, some rural networkers give us their take on how the NRNs can help make rural proofing initiatives more effective.



CORK 2.0 DECLARATION

Point 1 'Promoting Rural Prosperity'

"The rural potential to deliver innovative, inclusive and sustainable solutions... should be better recognised. A rural proofing mechanism should ensure this is reflected in Union policies and strategies. Rural and agricultural policies should build on the identity and dynamism of rural areas through the implementation of integrated strategies and multi-sectorial approaches."

According to the Declaration, the policy-makers of the European Union should: *"systematically review other macro and sectorial policies through a rural lens, considering potential and actual impacts and implications on rural jobs and growth and development prospects, social well-being, and the environmental quality of rural areas and communities."*

COMMON RURAL TRAITS

The 'rural challenge' for policy-makers everywhere shares several traits. First, the characteristics of remoteness and population sparsity mean that policy delivery costs can be higher in rural than in urban areas. This leads to calls for higher per capita funding and/or the deployment of different delivery methods.

Second, the needs, preferences and potential of rural residents may differ from those of their urban counterparts. This difference can raise challenges and offer opportunities for public policy, ranging from rural areas' positive contributions to

regional and national development through to their support needs.

Third, although dominated historically by agriculture, rural issues span many distinct policy areas and tiers of government. Although this is increasingly recognised, cross-cutting co-ordination across different policy and delivery bodies is often problematic. This leads to calls for more joined-up government.

Fourth, policy design and delivery both face budgetary constraints limiting the resources available. For example, in terms of constructing an objective evidence base to identify genuine rural-specific

requirements, designing appropriate policy responses and ensuring consideration of rural interests alongside competing policy interests.

Responding to this shared rural challenge requires processes for gathering and interpreting evidence, consulting with stakeholders and liaising across different parts of government to identify where and how to best address rural issues. Such processes can take different forms and may vary in effectiveness and complexity. Rural proofing is one such approach and it is gaining in momentum.

INTERVIEW

Phil Hogan

European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development



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Commissioner Hogan outlines his ambition for rural proofing, noting, "we need to knock down silos and focus on delivering results for our rural citizens."



What is rural proofing to you?

Rural proofing is an essential recommendation in the Cork 2.0 Declaration, to which I can fully subscribe. It is about making sure that rural communities are heard and their well-being considered when policies are formulated and budgets are drawn up. However, it is more than just checking for potential impact and implications of policies. It is also about designing schemes

and strategies that reflect the needs and aspirations of rural communities, about recognising the rural potential to deliver innovative, inclusive and sustainable solutions. Effective rural proofing should therefore proactively include rural communities and their potential in the policy design stage.



What are the benefits of rural proofing?

Rural proofing will deliver benefits not just for rural communities, but also for society as a whole, because rural areas are uniquely placed to provide solutions to multiple societal challenges. Rural proofing can help promote solutions that benefit rural jobs and growth or better access to basic services.

Take for instance the case of connectivity. If public policy were blind to the specific needs of rural areas, little effort would be made to roll out broadband in remote areas. After all, if the money is spent in urban areas, more citizens would benefit from the investment. But fortunately, this is not how the EU works! As European Commission President Juncker said in the State of the Union speech this year; in a Union of equals, there are no second-class citizens. It is important that our policies have the capacity to improve the lives of all Europeans and rural proofing could help us achieve just that.

However, rural proofing is not just benefitting rural communities. There is a lot of potential in rural areas to develop new and more sustainable value chains, in particular related to the circular economy and the bioeconomy. Accelerating this type of resource-efficient growth will of course benefit society as a whole, just think about the importance of shifting to green renewable energy. Yet, if these budding rural entrepreneurs and businesses do not have the right conditions to develop their businesses, we will not be able to unleash this potential and no one will benefit.

What is needed to take it forward – what is happening now?

First of all, we need the right tools to assess the impact. The European Commission is currently developing an impact assessment tool which will help different departments measure the impact of their policies on rural areas.

Secondly, a tool is only as good as the hand that uses it. So, we have to make sure that the tool is used and that it is used well. I know that in some EU Member States, they have designated specific 'rural champions' that promote the use of rural proofing – for instance,



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the Rural Development departments. This is perhaps something that we can learn from at the EU level.

Finally, we need to get better at working together across policy areas and with the many different layers involved in rural development – local, regional, national and EU. I believe we are making real headway in this direction. One example is the work we are doing on Smart Villages. Here, we have a number of fields working together: Agricultural and Rural Development policy, Regional policy, Transport policy, Research and Innovation policy and Digital policy.

The European Parliament is very involved and supports the development of Smart Villages as are the Committee of Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee. We are also launching a Thematic Working Group within the ENRD, which will help us connect and get the local communities involved. I believe that this type of initiative is gaining a lot of traction in the political sphere and on the ground because everyone can recognise a winning horse. And this is really also the essence of the Cork 2.0 Declaration – that we need to knock down silos and focus on delivering results for our rural citizens.



Any word of encouragement for the networks?

I can only say, keep up the good work! I believe that what you are doing in terms of networking, sharing knowledge, best practice and learning from each other is a prime example of what the European Union is about: creating progress and prosperity together.

A FOCUS ON... RURAL PROOFING

THE NETWORK VIEW

NRNs can be drivers of rural proofing

Recent meetings of the National Rural Networks (NRNs) have seen the subject of rural proofing rise up the agenda. Why is the network talking about this topic now and how can it contribute?

Rural proofing is about increasing cooperation and joining up policy for better global results, i.e. avoiding the silo effect, as Commissioner Hogan mentions in his interview in this edition of Rural Connections. Several countries already see rural proofing as a mechanism to ensure that rural areas benefit. The ENRD CP asked rural networkers for their insights, revealing some interesting ideas.

- Successful rural proofing requires a political or administrative 'champion'. In Finland, this is the Rural Policy Committee, in England it is DEFRA (the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs). In all cases, the NRNs are closely involved with these organisations and have been given specific responsibilities.

“The NRN brings stakeholders together in a neutral space to identify the various pieces of the jigsaw, until the full picture becomes visible to all.”

Maria Gustafsson,
Swedish Network Support Unit

- To be effective, rural proofing requires evidence of the effect of different policies on rural areas. NRNs help in the collection of this evidence and they can create stakeholder feedback channels on policy gaps and inefficiencies, ultimately keeping rural issues on the policy agenda.

- The NRNs' role is particularly important when new policies are being introduced that could have a major impact on rural services. For example, Finland is undergoing significant administrative reforms with the merger of many smaller local authorities. A Swedish parliamentary committee has proposed 65 new measures for rural development. In both cases, the NRNs are actively collecting evidence and engaging with rural stakeholders.

“Rural proofing is a wider concept than just official consultations and checklists. NRNs' stakeholder involvement activities could be seen as part of the process.”

Ave Bremse,
Estonian Network Support Unit

- Rural proofing is applied by different ministries, departments and levels of government. As it is often not obligatory, administrators have to perceive its value and not see it as yet another burden. There is a need for clear guidance and training. NRNs can and are helping. For example, in Finland, the NRN is helping to assess the effects of the administrative reform in three pilot rural areas.

- NRNs are especially effective in reaching 'hidden voices' – sectors and groups of the population that have less influence in formal decision-making channels. For example, in Finland, the NRN has engaged LAGs to help reach out to local people.

“The role of the NRNs in rural proofing is to show the human stories behind the quantitative evidence, to get the passion raised, so that people can understand the real impact of the policy on rural communities.”

James Elliott,
UK England, Network Support Unit

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Interested in joining the NRN discussion on rural proofing?
Contact Elena Maccioni:
elena.maccioni@enrd.eu

A FOCUS ON... RURAL PROOFING

REPORT

The long and winding path to rural proofing

The UK approach has evolved considerably since mandatory rural proofing was introduced in England in 2000.



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Rural proofing was adopted to ensure that appropriate attention is paid to addressing rural issues across all policy areas in the UK. The related guidance refers to understanding the impacts of government policy intervention, ensuring fair and equitable policy outcomes for rural areas and finding the best ways to deliver policies in rural areas. In this, there are clear parallels to proofing of policies for other cross-cutting issues such as age, gender equality or climate change concerns.

Although definitions may vary, proofing typically involves a formal requirement to follow a checklist of questions, supported by specialist guidance and advice, and to

demonstrate how rural issues have been considered and addressed. It may also be accompanied by formal consultation and monitoring procedures.

Many of these elements may have been deployed under different names in other countries, but an OECD review⁽¹⁾ in 2011 reported that England was unique in how it had developed this approach.

Given that the Cork 2.0 Declaration includes a commitment to rural proofing across the EU, this edition of Rural Connections has investigated the origins, purpose and effectiveness of rural proofing in England and other parts of the UK.

(1) OECD Rural Policy Reviews: England, United Kingdom, OECD Publications, Paris, 2011.

ENGLAND

A mandatory rural proofing requirement was introduced in England in 2000. The commitment has been renewed repeatedly (most recently in 2017) although the precise details and institutional arrangements have evolved to reflect process improvements and changing government structures. There has also been a gradual shift in emphasis towards mainstreaming to ensure that policies are tailored to local needs, whether rural or urban, with rural proofing as a mechanism to achieve this.

“Government departments must up their rural proofing game.”

England Rural Coalition, 2017

Responsibility for rural proofing lies with individual government departments, but is supported by the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) as the champion of rural issues.

Support takes the form of guidance and evidence provision to help complete a checklist of questions.

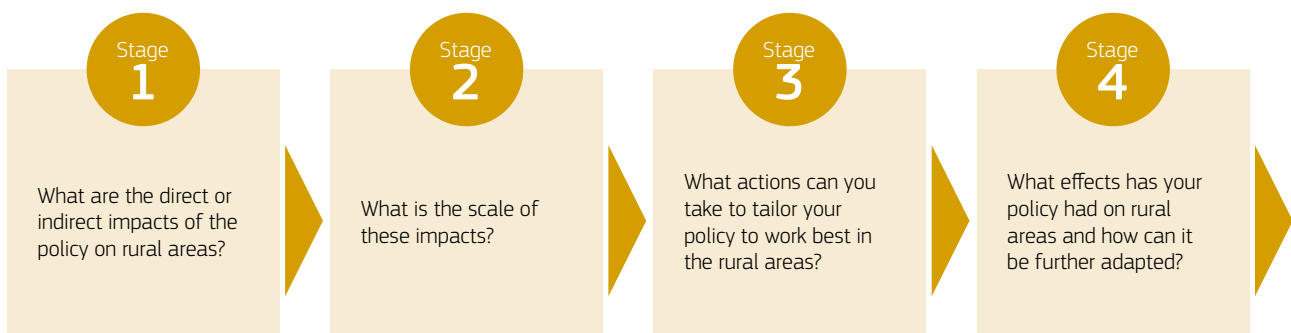
Following an independent review in 2015⁽²⁾, DEFRA has recently issued fresh guidance⁽³⁾ for their four-stage rural proofing process. The first stage entails reviewing evidence and engaging in stakeholder consultations to identify whether a policy will affect rural areas, with the second stage then considering the scale of impacts and whether they are different in urban and rural areas. If differential effects are present or expected and are judged large enough to merit mitigation, the third stage is to consider how policy/delivery could be adjusted. The fourth stage is on-going monitoring and evaluation of policy effects and consideration of possible further adjustments.

The guidance provides a list of common issues to consider, together with a range of suggested adjustment options and some

case studies of how rural proofing has been applied successfully. In addition, there are pointers to sources of information and advice, including from in-house specialists.

The revised guidance is accompanied by renewed commitments to encourage closer and more regular contact between rural specialists and staff in other government bodies. This is important since the 2015 review echoed earlier reviews in finding that adherence to rural proofing requirements was persistently inconsistent across policy areas and often incomplete or absent (although instances of good practice were also noted). That is, notwithstanding mandatory requirements to undertake rural proofing, many policy-makers were either unaware of their obligations, lacked the skills or knowledge to follow proofing guidance or did not view it as a priority.

Four-stage rural proofing process



(2) Independent Rural Proofing Implementation Review, Report to DEFRA, Lord Cameron of Dillington, January 2015.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rural-proofing-independent-implementation-review-lord-cameron-review>

(3) Rural proofing: practical guidance to assess impacts of policies on rural areas, DEFRA, March 2017.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/600450/rural-proofing-guidance.pdf

NORTHERN IRELAND

The Northern Ireland Executive committed to rural proofing in 2002, issuing guidance and offering some specialist support, whilst requiring government bodies to note rural proofing activities in annual reports. Following a review in 2005, which revealed disappointing adherence to proofing requirements, the guidance was revised with the help of external stakeholders and additional dedicated support resources were put in place.

“There is a real need for the rural-proofing agenda to be pushed very hard.”

Rural Community Network, NI, 2014

An Inter-departmental Rural Proofing Steering Group was also formed, to coordinate the rural proofing process and review its effectiveness. Unfortunately, adherence to proofing requirements remained inconsistent and external stakeholders called for rural proofing to be placed on a statutory footing, with the

result that they were included in the Rural Needs Act, Northern Ireland, 2016. The effects of this, and simplified reporting, have yet to become apparent, but local research indicates that more clarity for officials and stakeholders regarding terminology and responsibilities is needed, suggesting further guidance and support may follow.

WALES

The Welsh government committed to mandatory rural proofing in the early 2000s. It has repeatedly renewed that commitment at various stages and in various official documents. Policy officials must complete impact assessments and are encouraged to engage with specialist support at the earliest opportunity.

“All Welsh government and EU investment programmes need to be subjected to a rigorous process of ‘rural proofing’.”

Welsh Council for Voluntary Action, 2014

Written guidance is available for a two-stage process comprising a screening tool and checklist, with the former reviewed by a specialist rural proofing team to consider whether likely impacts require the full checklist to be completed in order to adjust policy and/or delivery design.

Policy officials have the opportunity to work with specialist staff to help capture the data and evidence that are required to understand the situation in rural areas and the particular challenges they face. However, adherence to rural proofing requirements appears to be inconsistent and various external stakeholders have called for improvements.

SCOTLAND

In contrast to other parts of the UK, Scotland has not adopted rural proofing as the process for ensuring consideration of cross-cutting rural issues. Rather, a process of mainstreaming has been followed, addressing rural issues as a matter of course within more general policy debates. This places the emphasis more formally upon mechanisms for consultation with stakeholders and for discussions between different parts and tiers of government.

A Scottish rural parliament was established in 2014 to improve opportunities for stakeholders to discuss the needs of rural residents and businesses. The preference for mainstreaming reflects the dominance of rural areas in Scottish geography, including some very remote and island communities (a very different type of rurality to that in England).

However, notwithstanding publication of successive strategy documents and repeated reaffirmations of government commitments to rural areas, stakeholder groups have called for rural proofing.





© Rural Matters, Matt Cartney, 2017

Momentum towards this may strengthen following the imminent introduction of legislative requirements for island proofing to address the specific policy concerns of a sub-set of rural communities located on Scottish islands.

CONCLUSION

Adopted in the early 2000s, rural proofing remains the process of choice in England, Northern Ireland and Wales for seeking fair and efficient policy outcomes. However, details vary between countries and have evolved over time, reflecting evidence of inconsistent and incomplete implementation.

Obligations have been clarified, guidance renewed, specialist support increased and mechanisms for cross-government interactions at all levels formalised. The latter represents a slight shift in emphasis and language towards the mainstreaming of rural issues, particularly in England. In Scotland, where mainstreaming has to date been the preferred approach, the adoption of island proofing may yet strengthen calls for wider rural proofing.

As such, there may be some convergence of approaches across the UK and joint meetings involving representatives of all four parts of the UK have been held. This may reflect a pragmatic recognition that, irrespective of their specific circumstances, some common challenges remain. For example, how to address differences within rural areas as well as with urban areas, how to compete for officials' attention against other priorities, how best to utilise evidence and how to judge success.⁽⁴⁾ This does not mean that approaches can simply

be transferred between jurisdictions, not least because the nature of rurality differs markedly, nor that any one approach is superior, merely that the need to continually adapt public administration and governance arrangements can be helped by sharing of experiences.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

England Rural Coalition, 2017:

<http://acre.org.uk/cms/resources/rural-coalition-statement-2017-low-res.pdf>

Rural Community Network, NI, 2014:

<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/agriculture-and-rural-development/reviews/anti-poverty/evidence-session/rural-community-network.pdf>

Welsh Council for Voluntary Action, 2014:

https://www.wcva.org.uk/media/959946/wcvaresponse_rdp2014-2020.14april2014eng.pdf

(4) Some critics have noted that the purpose of rural proofing is seldom fully articulated and targets are rarely defined.

A FOCUS ON... RURAL PROOFING

OPINION

Guillaume Cros

Rapporteur of the European Committee of the Regions on the future of the CAP post 2020 and Vice-President of the Occitanie Regional Council

The implementation of 'rural proofing' requires strong political support at the European level, through the adoption of a rural agenda



© European Union, Patrick Mascart

In the European Committee of the Regions' (CoR) opinion on the future of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) post 2020⁽¹⁾, adopted on 12 July 2017, we stress that rural areas are falling behind urban areas and that this gap is all the more worrying as it is still growing, partly because the development of big cities and capitals is picking up pace – under the impetus of European policy.

The way in which structural funds are used is clearly exacerbating these inequalities. Aid has been disbursed unequally under the first pillar of the CAP, European agricultural

markets have become increasingly liberalised, and today's international trade rules are causing production to become concentrated in intensive farming areas, as farms close down elsewhere at an ever-growing pace. European Rural Development policy since 1999 has failed to reverse this trend, because, compared to the first pillar of the CAP, it has been woefully underfunded and Member States' co-financing has fallen well short of needs.

Beyond the CAP, we must provide more entry points and ensure that rural areas are given due consideration across all aspects of European policy. Rural needs cannot be met by Rural Development policy alone. The CoR study⁽²⁾ on the European budget dedicated to rural development showed how current funding is inadequate when measured against the important role that rural areas play in Europe. More worrying still, the budget is significantly smaller than under the previous programming period – from 32.6% of the structural funds to just 21.3% for the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2014-2020.

Rural development has taken a major funding hit under the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), because fund managers have sought to steer more

(1) The CAP after 2020, Committee of the Regions opinion, 12 July 2017.

<http://cor.europa.eu/en/activities/opinions/pages/opinion-factsheet.aspx?OpinionNumber=CDR%201038/2017>

(2) Evolution of the Budget Dedicated for Rural Development Policy, Committee of the Regions, 2016

<https://cor.europa.eu/en/documentation/studies/Documents/Evolution-Budget-Dedicated-Rural-Development-Policy.pdf>



© Altes Kriwec

money to urban areas in line with the EU's urban agenda, and because sky-high co-funding requirements have made the fund unsuited to the needs of rural areas.

Rural exodus – especially young people moving from rural and remote areas to large and medium-sized towns and cities – is a major issue across Europe. So it is particularly regrettable to note that the European Social Fund (ESF) for vocational training has made little inroads into rural areas. Under the current programming period, just 7% of the ESF is allocated to rural areas – far short of the funding that these areas need.

In line with the territorial cohesion dimension of the Lisbon Treaty, rural development should be made a top priority across all aspects of structural policy. Yet, doing so would require a rethink of the EU's structural and regional strategies.

The first Cork Declaration, adopted on 9 November 1996, rightly called for a fairer balance of public spending and infrastructure investments between rural and urban areas. This call has quite clearly gone unheeded because no targeted commitments were made. The CoR is determined to see a European action plan put in place to make

sure the Cork 2.0 Declaration does not suffer the same fate. The Commission will need to act quickly, bringing in practical measures to implement rural proofing across all aspects of EU policy.

Moreover, the action plan will require strong political support at the European level, through the adoption of a rural agenda that complements the urban agenda. In May 2017, the CoR teamed up with Rurality-Environment-Development (R.E.D.) to organise a conference entitled 'RURAL post-2020: more ambitious, more transversal! A rural agenda to re-enchant the European project'.

One of the findings was that so-called rural proofing initiatives had encountered only modest success in Finland and Canada because of a lack of genuine horizontal coordination across all policy areas with an impact on rural development. Horizontal coordination of this type can only happen if the political will is there.

That is why the CoR has thrown its weight behind calls for a rural agenda from the European Countryside Movement and the parliamentary Intergroup on Rural, Mountainous and Remote Areas (RUMRA). A rural agenda would provide the necessary

policy framework and operational guidance to bring about a specific Rural Development policy that gives due consideration to the sheer diversity of rural areas and the multifaceted economic challenges they face.

There are plenty of local solutions. In France's Occitanie region, for example, we launched a call for projects to support integrated initiatives in rural areas (via the LEADER approach) and in urban areas (through integrated territorial investment). This joint call for projects has helped to drive coordinated, harmonious development across all territories. The next EU programming period (post 2020) will need to focus on helping all territories devise local, context-sensitive solutions and embark simultaneously on urban, peri-urban and rural development initiatives.

 FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

www.cor.europa.eu

A FOCUS ON... RURAL PROOFING

REPORT

Northern Lights: reflections before and after rural proofing

The Nordic experience is at the cutting edge of rural proofing. Finland has been using rural proofing for over ten years now. Following a comprehensive review of the practice, Sweden is about to decide upon exactly how rural proofing will shape its future rural development. Rural Connections explores some of the lessons from both countries.



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FINLAND

RURAL PROOFING PIONEERS

Finland is one of the most rural countries in Europe and is one of the few to use rural proofing at national, regional and local levels.⁽¹⁾ For over ten years, rural proofing has been encouraged as a method to ensure that the rural characteristics are better taken into account early in the decision-making process in Finland.

The objective of rural proofing in Finland is to increase equality between rural and urban areas whilst also improving knowledge of rural concerns. Rural proofing is considered central to attaining the rural policy vision, that the countryside forms an inseparable part of the national prosperity and society. From the outset, it was clear that a special focus in the rural proofing process should be assigned to the sparsely populated areas, which cover 68% of the country's land areas.

At the national level, the key actor preparing, coordinating and implementing rural policy is the Rural Policy Council,

(1) The preparation of the Finnish-related content would not have been possible without Christell Åström, Ministerial Advisor, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (Christell.astro@mmm.fi); and Taina Väre, Senior Advisor, Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities (Taina.Vare@kuntaliitto.fi).

'Broad' and 'narrow' rural policy

Finland has a comprehensive and integrated national strategy for rural development. Policies are divided into 'narrow' rural development – those directly targeted at rural areas, such as the RDPs – and 'broad' rural development – those policies such as education, health and transport which apply to the whole country but are also critical for the viability of rural life. Rural proofing provides the link between the two.

which is the horizontal cooperation body appointed by the government. The role of the Rural Policy Council is to improve the structures and practices of rural policy and rural development work on the basis of networks and partnerships and in a way that supports a place-based policy.

Rural proofing in Finland is divided into two levels: national, which is more strategic, and regional and local levels, which are more about the implementation process. The Council's guidelines and templates are recommended for use when a decision might have regional repercussions in rural areas, irrespective if the decision is made on a national or local level. Rural proofing is especially relevant where there are important administrative reforms taking place – as is the case now.

A TIME OF CHANGE

Finland is preparing for a major territorial administrative re-organisation. The control of various services and policies may move away from municipalities. Pilot studies are being carried out to guide the reform in other municipalities. As rural proofing involves representatives from the public, private and non-profit sectors, the process

has proven to be important in consolidating ideas and buy-in.

For example, the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities is coordinating a project, financed by the Rural Policy Council, which is piloting the tool for rural proofing in the process of ongoing regional reforms in two very different regions in Pirkanmaa and Kainuu.

The piloting will include: evaluation of material produced in the process of reform (2016-2017); local and regional workshops on selected themes (services, economy, democracy); as well as interviews and questionnaires.

The objective is to develop the tool in order to create a mechanism for new regions to include rural proofing into decision-making, both during the process of reform to recognise its possible impacts, and thereafter within the new regions, which will be established in 2018. The pilot is managed by a regional coordinator and a working group with representatives from various rural organisations.

VOLUNTARY OR MANDATORY?

One of the ongoing challenges for rural proofing is that it is still not mandatory or systematically used in the country. Administrations can choose to use it or not.

The voluntary nature of rural proofing is again under discussion. At the national level, a Parliamentary Working Group for Sparsely Populated Areas is examining whether rural proofing should be obligatory in sparsely populated regions. In addition, the Rural Policy Council is working to make the use of rural proofing more systematic. At the local level too, the work continues to embed the rural proofing process in the ongoing reforms and to encourage participation in the process.

THE NRN AND RURAL PROOFING

The Finnish NRN has very strong links with the Rural Policy Council. The role of the NRN in rural proofing will be important in the light of upcoming Finnish administrative reform.

In general, NRNs can assume a central role to increase awareness of policy-makers both at national and local levels on how rural proofing processes could add value to policies.

The Finnish NRN sees the participation of the Local Action Groups (LAGs) as being crucial to ensuring that the administrative reform makes the most of the experience and potential of LEADER to create and deliver services in Finland.

“*The Rural Policy Council dealing with wide rural policy puts rural issues on the agenda of policy-makers and provides guidance on how rural proofing can be performed. Every country should have one!*”

Juha-Matti Markkola, Finnish Network Support Unit

SWEDEN

PREPARING FOR RURAL PROOFING

In January 2017, a government-appointed Rural Areas Committee reported its proposals for a coherent national policy with 65 measures for the sustainable development of Swedish rural areas.

The Rural Areas Committee highlighted that a strong sectoral approach on the part of the state is problematic when it comes to complex policy areas such as rural policy. The right tools and approach are required to make it possible to coordinate measures in different policy areas. The committee specifically proposed that rural proofing be established in Sweden.

As part of its work, the Committee studied how rural proofing has been carried out in other countries. Certain policy areas were identified as most important for the development in rural areas, such as enterprise and entrepreneurship, infrastructure and broadband, and public and commercial services.

The Committee identified three conditions that make rural proofing effective: a real mandate from the government; a knowledge-building system; and some obligatory measures. This approach can deliver the clarity required to check the impact of decisions and policies on rural areas, provide incentives to improve research, and help gather knowledge in rural areas.

Measures having an impact on rural areas were identified by the committee. Under a rural-proofing mechanism, these would be checked by the respective public agencies concerned. A system of checklists created by national authorities and systems of rural proofing at municipality level were also considered.



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While conscious that rural-proofing procedures must not become a burden on policy-making, the Committee noted those tasked with leading rural affairs need to monitor and report on the political decisions made with or without rural proofing.

CONSULTATION WITH CIVIL SOCIETY

The Committee's final report was opened for consultation and sent to around 400 non-governmental organisations and relevant government agencies for consideration. Some feedback criticised the additional administrative burden the proposals could create for policy-makers. Those who support the proposals highlighted the need to identify and give a mandate to those responsible for rural proofing, as well as to systematically monitor the results.

The Swedish NRN has participated in the discussions on rural proofing. Depending on how the rural proofing system is implemented, there may be a future role to play in reaching out to local stakeholders, collecting experience-based knowledge, and supporting comprehensive analysis of rural issues.

It remains to be seen to what extent Sweden will utilise rural proofing. The

government is analysing the feedback received and is expected to present its proposition in spring 2018. Interestingly, an OECD territorial review of Sweden⁽²⁾, published in 2017, recommends that Sweden develop a national rural policy, which is complementary and integrates effectively with the existing regional growth policy. The existing regional growth policy has the ambition to consider the rural dimension as well as the urban dimension in regional development.

NEXT STEPS

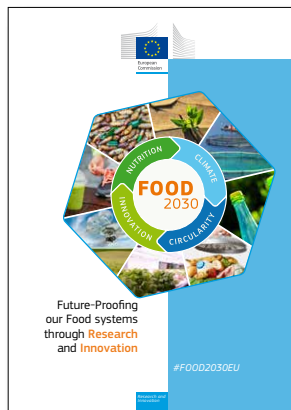
Rural proofing has the potential to transform the practice of rural development. The ENRD CP will continue monitoring the rural proofing pioneers and sharing the lessons learned with the network.

(2) OECD Territorial Reviews: Sweden, 2017, OECD Publishing, Paris. www.oecd.org/sweden/oecd-territorial-reviews-sweden-2017-9789264268883-en.htm

Books & publications

Future-Proofing our Food systems through Research and Innovation

European Commission, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation



The publication overviews the contribution of European Research and Innovation (R&I) policies to food system transformation, so as to make systems sustainable, resilient, diverse, inclusive and competitive.

The systemic approach to connect, scale-up and boost R&I – referred to as FOOD 2030 – is designed to provide solutions to four overarching priorities: nutrition; climate; circularity; and innovation. The publication features EU-funded research projects under each of the four priorities that have contributed to achieving sustainable food systems.

Overall, the publication outlines the principles of the FOOD 2030 initiative, encouraging an open debate amongst stakeholders on future food value chains, while also preparing the ground for the next EU R&I Framework Programme and outlook towards 2030.

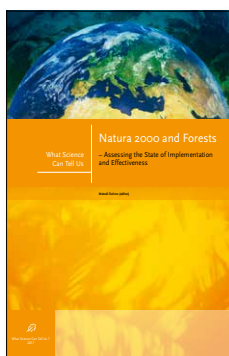
ISBN 978-92-79-69840-8

Natura 2000 and Forests

Assessing the state of implementation and effectiveness

European Forest Institute

The publication brings together information on how Natura 2000 – the EU-wide ecological network of protected areas – is implemented in forests, its effects on biodiversity, forest management and other land uses across the EU.



Aiming to bridge a gap in existing knowledge, the study compiles scientific research and makes recommendations to help policy-makers deal with the many issues related to the practical implementation of biodiversity conservation in EU forests. It explores how forest biodiversity is monitored, as well as the challenges, achievements, effectiveness and efficiency of Natura 2000 implementation in forests from policy, economic and ecological perspectives.

conservation in EU forests. It explores how forest biodiversity is monitored, as well as the challenges, achievements, effectiveness and efficiency of Natura 2000 implementation in forests from policy, economic and ecological perspectives.

ISBN 978-952-5980-37-0

Family Farming in Spain 2017

Union of Small Farmers and Breeders (UPA)



The publication explores the overarching themes of agriculture, development and innovation in rural territories, and risks of depopulation. Rural development practitioners will find a variety of articles, analytical studies and

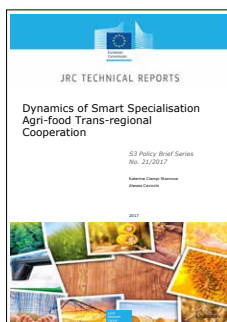
data on topics such as climate change, smart LEADER, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) post-2020, digitisation, and diversification of rural activities.

Overall, the publication addresses contemporary challenges facing rural areas, including territorial structures, demographics and depopulation affecting many territories in Spain and worldwide.

ISSN 1887-9292

Dynamics of Smart Specialisation Agri-food Trans-regional Cooperation

European Commission,
Joint Research Centre



The policy brief is intended to inform policy-makers, practitioners and researchers about the dynamics, governance and functioning of the Agri-food Smart Specialisation Platform. It outlines the milestones of the process and the main achievements.

The publication proposes steps to be followed by policy-makers and regional officers who are motivated to lead,

support and actively contribute to thematic partnerships within the Agri-food Platform. It provides four case studies on such partnerships, describing the motivations and objectives of the participating regions.

The case studies cover the topics of: High technology farming (Tuscany, Italy); Traceability and Big Data (Andalusia, Spain and Emilia-Romagna, Italy); European agri-food and smart electronic systems (Flanders, Belgium); and Bioeconomy Pilot - Agri-Food (Lombardy, Italy and Randstad, The Netherlands).

ISBN 978-92-79-70281-5

The future of food and agriculture

Trends and challenges

Food and Agriculture Organization
of the United Nations (FAO)

The publication is intended to increase understanding of the nature of the challenges that agriculture and food systems are currently

facing and will continue to face throughout the 21st century.

It analyses 15 interdependent global trends, providing insights into a set of 10 challenges to

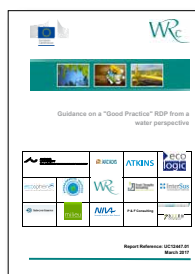
achieving food security and nutrition for all and making agriculture sustainable. Arguing that business-as-usual is no longer an option, the publication calls for major transformations in agricultural systems, rural economies and natural resource management.

ISBN 978-92-5-109551-5



DG Environment publications on soil and water

European Commission, Directorate-General for Environment (DG ENV)



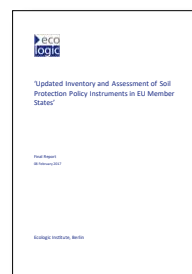
Guidance on a "Good Practice" RDP
from a water perspective

REF UC12447.01



European level report: Key descriptive
statistics on the consideration of
water issues in the RDPs 2014-2020

REF UC12064.01



Updated Inventory and Assessment
of Soil Protection Policy Instruments in
EU Member States, Ecologic Institute,
Berlin (commissioned by DG ENV)

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> or you can subscribe by emailing subscribe@enrd.eu. For further information write to info@enrd.eu.

EU RURAL REVIEW

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

No.24 – Re-imagining rural business opportunities



KF-AJ-17-001-EN-N

No.23 – Green economy – Opportunities for rural europe



KF-AJ-16-023-EN-C

No.22 – Smart and competitive food and drink supply chains



KF-AJ-16-022-EN-C

EAFRD PROJECTS BROCHURE

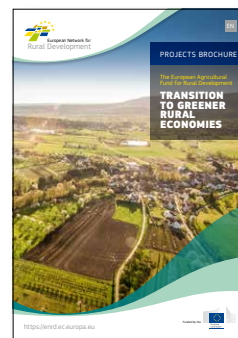
The ENRD publishes brochures presenting good and interesting examples of EAFRD-funded projects. Each edition highlights successful project examples around a particular rural development theme. The brochures aim to showcase the achievements of the EAFRD and inspire further projects. They are published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

Supporting Rural Business



KF-AP-17-002-EN-N

Transition to Greener Rural Economies



KF-04-17-108-EN-C

Migrant and refugee integration



KF-01-16-688-EN-C

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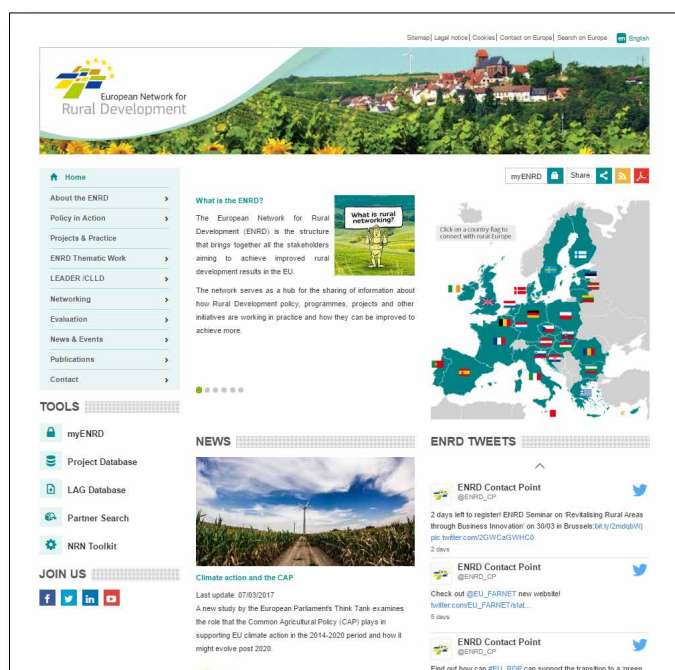
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via EU Bookshop (<http://bookshop.europa.eu>);
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by contacting the Europe Direct service (http://europa.eu/europedirect/index_en.htm) or calling 00 800 6 7 8 9 10 11 (freephone number from anywhere in the EU) (*).

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