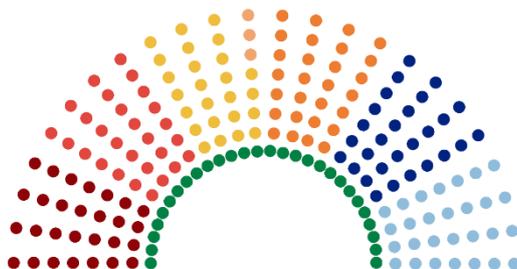


European Rural Networks Assembly



1st Meeting

Report of the Meeting

Brussels, 26 January 2015



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1. Morning plenary session

Introductions

Note: Presentations can be directly downloaded by clicking on the link provided

9.00 – 9.15



Opening remarks by Aldo Longo, Director, Directorate H, DG AGRI
In his opening remarks, Director Aldo Longo highlighted that the Rural Networks' Assembly was set up on 20 November 2014 by Commission Implementing Decision 2014/825/EU and holds its first meeting on 26 January 2015. Chaired by DG AGRI, it is composed of 196 members including governmental stakeholders (managing authorities and paying agencies), non-governmental and local stakeholders (EU-wide organisations, Local Action Groups), innovation stakeholders (research institutes, Farm Advisory Services). This composition takes into account the need for cooperation between the ENRD and the EIP-AGRI network and to include stakeholders widely and in a balanced way. The members of the Assembly are fixed by Decision 2014/825/EU. The same Decision provides that each member has only one representative within the Assembly. There is therefore no possibility to increase the number of representatives and it has not been possible to accept the requests received for extra seats. However, the possibilities for active participation in EU level networking through the thematic work and sub groups was highlighted.

The Chair noted that some Local Action Groups, Advisory Services and National Rural Networks were represented by managing authorities. This is considered acceptable for the first meeting, considering that the setting-up procedure at national level for some these bodies has not been completed. The actual members for these stakeholder groups should be provided to the Commission as soon as the setting-up process is completed. DG AGRI will follow up this process in cooperation with the Member States.

9.00 – 9.15

Introduction to the Rural Networks' Assembly by Mihail Dumitru, Deputy Director General DG AGRI

Mihail Dumitru, Deputy Director General of DG AGRI, introduced the first Rural Networks' Assembly meeting. He highlighted that the meeting was the first concrete output of the EU decision to invest more on rural networks in 2014-2020 and as such, both an achievement and a starting point.

Mr Dumitru provided the Assembly with an up-date on the process of approval of the 118 Rural Development Programmes submitted by the Member States. He highlighted the role of rural development networks in the current phase of the programming period and the mission of the Assembly to promote coordination, synergies and efficiency gains between the ENRD and the EIP-AGRI network and to provide the strategic framework for their activities.

Mr Dumitru urged all the members of the Assembly to take their role very seriously and develop a sense of ownership of the policy. Expectations for the rural networks in the 2014-2020 period are that they manage to meaningfully involve all stakeholders in sharing their experiences and that, as a result, the quality and effectiveness of policy implementation will improve, leading to better use of resources and better results.

Governance and Strategic Framework

9.15 – 10.00

[EU Rural Networks' Governance Structure by Antonella Zona, DG AGRI](#)

Rural Networks' Assembly governance structure

Antonella Zona of DG AGRI presented the Rural Networks' governance structure and the draft rules of procedure of the Assembly.

The governance structure of the networks is based on Commission Implementing Decision 825/2014/EU. It is a common structure for the ENRD (including the evaluation tasks) and the EIP-AGRI network built upon the principles of coordination between the two networks, broad inclusiveness of stakeholders, targeting and flexibility for the thematic work.

Rules of procedure of the Rural Networks' Assembly

The Commission representative informed that the draft rules of procedure sent to the members of the Assembly on 21/01/2014 are based on the standard text used for all similar Commission Groups since 2010 (SEC(2010) 1360 final). The following points were clarified by DG AGRI, in reply to questions raised by some members of the Assembly:

- the documents produced at all the governance levels (Assembly, Steering Group and operational sub-groups) will be made available through the ENRD website, to ensure the broadest possible dissemination.
- Meeting agendas will always include space for “any other business” so that members of the Assembly can put forward points. When discussion points are raised in advanced to the chairman, the Commission and other members of the Assembly will be better prepared to discuss those issues.
- Applications to be part of the sub-groups have not been sent out yet. All Assembly members will be kept informed.

The Chair concluded that there was consensus on the adoption of the Rural Networks' Assembly's rules of procedure in the version sent on 21/01/2014 (Annex I to these minutes).

10.00 – 10.30

['Setting up the Rural Network's Steering Group' by Matthias Langemeyer, DG AGRI](#)

Proposal for the Rural Networks' Steering Group

Matthias Langemeyer of DG AGRI presented the structure of the Rural Networks' Steering Group. The composition of the Steering Group is to be proposed by the members of the Assembly and progress to date on volunteers within each category was explained.

The Chair thanked the Assembly's members who have actively participated in the process of identifying the members of the Steering Group. The result so far (as presented by Mr. Langemeyer) appears very balanced. The Chair asked the audience if there were objections.

Given the limited number of seats available in the Steering Group for members of the RD CDG and the possibility for rotation, PREPARE asked to be considered volunteer joining it.

DG AGRI welcomed the interest expressed by PREPARE and agreed that a system based on a rotation principle could be appropriate to ensure participation from different stakeholder sectors, ensuring a geographical and thematic balance. If the RD Civil Dialogue Group proposed this rotation and the inclusion of PREPARE, it would be accepted by the Commission.

The Chair concluded ¹ that there was a consensus on the proposal for the Steering Group members, as listed in the slide presented by the Commission. On this basis the Director general of DG AGRI will adopt a decision in the next few days appointing the members of the Steering Group. The first meeting of the Steering Group is scheduled on 25 February 2015.

Setting up the Permanent sub-groups for Innovation and LEADER-CLLD

The Chair informed the Assembly that stakeholders have already expressed interest in starting the thematic work concerning LEADER/CLLD and Innovation as soon as possible. It is therefore proposed that the permanent Subgroup on LEADER/CLLD and the permanent Subgroup on Innovation are set up by the Assembly at the first meeting.

At the current phase of the programming period (beginning 2015), taking into account the evaluation activities already foreseen, it is proposed to postpone the discussion on the permanent Subgroup on Evaluation to the next meeting of the Assembly, based on the work of the Steering Group.

[‘Subgroup on Leader and Community-led Local Development’ by Riin Saluveer, DG AGRI](#)

Riin Saluveer of DG AGRI presented the main lines for the composition and mandate of the LEADER/CLLD sub-group.

Pilar Gumma Solernou of DG AGRI presented the main lines for the composition and mandate of the Innovation sub-group.

[‘Subgroup on innovation for agricultural productivity and sustainability’ by Pilar Gumma, DG AGRI](#)

DG AGRI clarified that there will be a call for interest for both subgroups and applications from the members of the Assembly as per composition of the relevant sub-group will be most welcome. Whereas the members of all governance bodies are institutions/organisations (not individuals), the representatives that participate in the Steering Group, the Sub-groups and the Assembly do not necessarily need to be the same.

In regards to the **Subgroup on Innovation for agricultural productivity and sustainability**, several Assembly members considered its size insufficient to deal with such broad, new theme (EIP structures new both at MS and EU level).

Several territorial development stakeholders asked **not to exclude LEADER** when discussing innovation, as innovation has been one of the principles of the LEADER approach, and LAGs have proved to be transition mechanisms to communicate the needs from the ground to research.

DG AGRI clarified that the difference between the two sub-groups in size was partly due to the nature of the theme that each sub-group is dealing with (more than 2,000 LEADER groups functioning during last programming period, with an increased scope in the context of ESI Funds.) It was stated, however, that the size of the sub-group on Innovation for Agricultural productivity and sustainability would be reconsidered, with a view on keeping balanced representation from different stakeholder groups, and the necessary expertise.

With regards to the inclusion of LEADER LAGs in the Innovation Subgroup, a communication channel between both sub-groups should be considered to avoid overlaps or to allow a discussion between the groups on specific issues.

Clarification by DG AGRI regarding the size of the Permanent sub-group on Innovation²: In answer to the request put forward by the Assembly during the morning session, DG AGRI confirmed the intention to extend the number of members of the Innovation sub-group from 30 to a maximum of 60, provided that a balanced composition of the stakeholders group is respected.

As a conclusion, the Assembly agreed to set up a permanent sub-group on innovation for agricultural productivity and sustainability and second permanent sub-group on LEADER and community led local development in line with the mandate as introduced and discussed during the meeting.

11.00 – 11.45
[‘Strategic Framework for the EU Rural Networks’ by Rob Peters, Head of Unit, DG AGRI](#)

Building blocks for the Strategic framework of the Rural Networks
Rob Peters, Head of Unit H5 at DG AGRI, presented the common strategic framework that has been developed for both networks based on the relevant EU legislation. A common framework embracing both networks is important as the Rural Networks’ Assembly is the single main governance structure. The framework will be the basis for discussions during the workshops.

Main points of discussion:

¹ This conclusion was made in the afternoon plenary session.

² This clarification was made in the afternoon plenary session.

Participants were interested to know more about the process of choosing themes for Working Groups and selecting members of the non-permanent groups. DG AGRI representatives explained that the workshops in the afternoon will be the place to formulate themes that could be further elaborated by the Steering Group. Participation to networking activities is in general open, the main channels being through the Assembly and Steering Group, but other options are also possible. Web-based platforms and social media will be additional, important tools for getting involved and will facilitate the participation of all interested stakeholders.

11.45 – 12.00

[‘Introduction to the parallel workshops’ by Michael Gregory, Deputy Team Leader, ENRD Contact Point](#)

Introduction to the parallel workshops

Michael Gregory of the ENRD Contact Point presented the themes and working methods of the five parallel workshops. The workshop topics correspond to the common strategic framework presented. Mr. Gregory stressed that workshop topics are interlinked and the questions are meant primarily to stimulate discussion.

Keynote speeches

12.00 – 12.15



Keynote message by Commissioner Phil HOGAN

Phil Hogan, the Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, expressed his satisfaction with the rural networks working together as they have an important role in helping the Commissioner fulfil his mandate. He mentioned some of the challenges facing the agri-food sector: more efficient production while ensuring sustainability and delivering public goods. There is a need to maintain farming attractive to the young generation, to strengthen and diversify rural economies, and to boost the innovation capacity of rural actors. The Commissioner pointed out the need to show the benefits of the rural development policy. This is why a robust monitoring and evaluation system was put in place, that will allow to demonstrate the progress and achievements of the policy, assess the impact, effectiveness, efficiency and relevance of its interventions, and contribute to better targeting of funds. As the key challenge is to simplify rural policy delivery for farmers and other rural beneficiaries, the Commissioner invited all stakeholders to make proposals on how to achieve simpler rules. Rural networks can help by taking ownership of the implementation of rural development policy, making sure it delivers growth and jobs and that innovation and agriculture go hand in hand.

12.15 – 12.30

Keynote message by Kersti KALJULAIID, Member of the European Court of Auditors

Kersti Kaljulaid, member of the European Court of Auditors, expressed the view that rural networks can contribute to a better spending of rural development funding. There is need to develop a better performance culture, for instance by identifying and disseminating best practices and by looking for financial innovation. The error rate in payments needs to be reduced, one of the methods which seems to work well for the ESF is a more widespread use of simplified cost options. Financial instruments can help achieve more investment with less public money by attracting additional capital, but incentives are needed to ensure EU money actually creates multiplication and leverage effects (and not over-capitalised guarantee funds), and that after the end of the revolving period the funds follow the objectives for which they were originally earmarked.

2. Parallel workshops overview

The summary of each of the parallel workshops is presented below. A short report about each workshop is given in the Annexes.

Workshop 1: 'Better Networking with ENRD/EIP'

14.00 – 15.30

Summary

Main objective: To identify specific activities the Networks should prioritise to ensure more effective participation – in particular, how various networks and European stakeholder organisations can best work together/ complement each other's work to fulfil this common objective.

Methodology: Participants split into three groups to discuss 1) stakeholder needs/issues & (2) networking channels & methods to address these. They then shared their findings and discussed all together how the European rural networks can complement the work of other networks & organisations

Outcomes: Participants identified a series of key needs and networking channels related to the three overarching objectives of: competitive agriculture; sustainable management of natural resources; and balanced territorial development.

They concluded that rural networks can contribute most by supporting the exchange of good practices, communication of positive perspectives and providing forums for thematic exchange.

Workshop 2 'Farmers in Innovation'

14.00 – 15.30

Summary

About 30 people participated in this workshop in a varied group of stakeholders, where they were asked to reflect on how to further involve farmers in the EU Networks (ENRD and EIP-AGRI).

The results of the discussions in the group were relevant, comprising varied aspects from suggestions on several types of communication channels to the relevance of peer-to-peer learning. The group also highlighted the importance of communicating to farmers that innovation in agriculture is actually an opportunity to solve problems in farming. Furthermore, participants also discussed on how stakeholders in EU Networks can contribute to involve farmers, suggesting that they can support the exchange of good practices, translate information to national language or make information circulate faster (reaching local level), just to mention a few. Besides, the group considered that getting better access to concrete and relevant information and having the chance of playing a role in identifying priorities in research agenda topics are some of the benefits that farmers get when involved in the EU Networks, among others.

Workshops 3&4: 'Networking Priorities'

14.00 – 15.30

Summary

Main objective: to identify which priority themes the EU Networks should address (whether these be sectoral or horizontal) and how EU networking can address these.

Methodology: The workshop used a twinning method to discuss and identify priority themes in small groups before pooling all the ideas generated. Participants then voted on their priority themes, which were grouped into clusters.

Outcomes: The top five priority challenges/themes identified were: 1. Management and performance; 2. Simplification; 3. Demographic challenges; 4. Collaborative diversification; and 5. Monitoring and evaluation

Networking can help address these themes through activities such as disseminating good practice, providing technical guidance, communicating to increase understanding of complex issues, bringing stakeholders together, and creating forums/platforms for exchange.

Workshop 5: 'What should come first in Innovation'

14.00 – 15.30

Summary

The workshop purpose was to identify priority themes for innovation to increase productivity and sustainability in agriculture and forestry, and discuss how the participants could contribute to addressing these.

The introduction included some reflections on the subgroup for innovation, and presented the priority themes identified by the High Level Steering Board in the EIP-AGRI strategic implementation plan, as well as the 8 themes that resulted from a thorough analysis and clustering of the 109 potential focus group topics that were received through the EIP-AGRI website.

The participants discussed these themes in 4 groups, and they came up with 11 additional priority topics. In the subsequent prioritization exercise, 12 topics were proposed. Finally the whole group discussed and shared ideas for activities and specific actions to address these themes, and these were also reported to the Assembly plenary session.

The workshop outcome was a collection of priority topics for innovation and ideas for action for the participants. These results can now serve a base for work of the Assembly subgroup on innovation.

Workshop 6: 'Better communication with stakeholders'

14.00 – 15.30

Summary

Main objective: to identify priority communication activities for the European Rural Networks to complement stakeholders' existing awareness raising activities.

Methodology: The first part of the workshop focused on brainstorming on rural development communication goals, while the second produced a list of priority communication actions for the European Rural Networks.

Outcomes: Overall, the networks are most needed to support vertical information flows (in both directions), including the collection and dissemination of easy to understand RD policy-related information, good practices and stakeholders' activities. More efforts are needed to support the dissemination and accessibility of the information available (including consideration of language issues) and active peer exchange.

3. Afternoon plenary session

Summary and Report back of Workshops

Note: Presentations can be directly downloaded by clicking on the link provided

15.30 – 16.30

[Reports from workshops](#)

See Annex II for full workshop reports

Report back presentations from workshops

The key outcomes of the workshop were reported in the plenary session by the workshop rapporteurs.

- Workshop 1, “Better networking with ENRD/EIP”, Paul Soto, ENRD Contact point
- Workshop 2, “Farmers in innovation”, Pille Koorberg, EIP-AGRI Service Point
- Workshops 3 and 4, “Networking priorities”, Kaley Hart, ENRD Contact point
- Workshop 5, “What should come first in innovation”, Willemine Brinkman, EIP-AGRI Service Point
- Workshop 6, “Better communication with stakeholders”, Ed Thorpe, ENRD Contact point

Priorities and subjects for the thematic work

Following the restitution of the workshops the participants were asked to comment and put forward further ideas on the priority themes and subjects for the future work of the EU Networks.

Highlights from interventions:

- Demographic change in rural areas is not only a challenge but also an opportunity to increase older people’s involvement in rural development programmes.
- A great learning potential for achieving simplification lies in auditing and compliance controls. EU Networks could promote the exchange of practices in this area in order to develop fruitful learning processes.
- Further effort should be put in connecting RDPs and beneficiaries, listening to their concerns and ensuring programmes match rural communities’ needs. Integrated approaches to territorial development should be promoted. Crucially, the results of rural development interventions need to be better communicated to ensure citizens understand their full potential.
- Networking at the EU level should take a sectoral approach in order to be fully inclusive of all categories of stakeholders. Foresters should be fully involved in EU networking activities.

- LEADER networks' substantially contribute to EU Networking process, they are key in stimulating innovation, within and outside the farming sector.
- Western Balkan countries should be given the opportunity to be part of EU networking activities.
- There is room for empowering advisory services across and within countries. They are confronted with an increasing range of competences and possible areas of intervention, requiring adequate resources, capacity and working methods.

Wrap up and Closing Remarks

16.30 – 16.45
[‘How to bring this further? Next steps’ by Markus Holzer, Head of Unit, DG AGRI](#)

Wrap up and next meeting(s)

Markus Holzer, DG AGRI Head of Unit, presented an overview of the main events planned by the ENRD and by the EIP-AGRI-network for the first half of 2015.

16.45 – 17.00

Closing remarks by Aldo Longo, Director, Directorate H, DG AGRI

In his closing speech, Director Aldo Longo highlighted some key outcomes from the meeting and thematic challenges for the future work of EU Rural Networks. In addressing the audience, he stressed the spirit of inclusiveness of the Assembly and that active involvement of stakeholders is a necessary condition for networking activities to be effective.

Highlights form the speech:

- Rural development will need to achieve more ambitious outcomes with fewer resources. This is the context in which EU rural networks will need to build their way towards 2020.
- As far as innovation is concerned, the main challenge will be to ensure that EIP operational groups are established and ready to operate at the outset of the programmes' implementation. To this objective, national networks and farm advisory services can provide key support. Circular economy, precision farming and generational renewal (in particular, finding new attractive solutions for young farmers) emerge among the priority themes.
- Simplification in management and delivery of RDPs emerged as one of the key topics put forward by workshops 3 and 4; solutions such as simplified cost options will need to be looked at more closely. The Assembly has a great potential to suggest solutions to the main bottlenecks in the implementation of RDPs.

- Simplification is also a keyword in the Agriculture Commissioner's agenda as it is a catalyst of rural development interventions. Networks can and should play a key role in promoting simplification, first by bringing all concerned stakeholders (farmers, beneficiaries and others) around the discussion table to identify what the needs and issues are.
- A wealth of interesting experiences and suggestions for improvements can also come from auditing which is seen as a learning process.
- A new logic of performance needs to be adopted, which builds upon an improved understanding of the causes for irregularities and errors in RDP implementation. Better use should be made of new financial opportunities. Rural Networks have an important role to play in identifying and sharing good practices in this respect.

Annex I - Rules of Procedure of the Rural Networks' Assembly

Adopted on 26 January 2015

THE ASSEMBLY OF THE EUROPEAN NETWORK FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND OF THE EUROPEAN INNOVATION PARTNERSHIP NETWORK,

Having regard to Chapter II of Commission Implementing Decision 2014/825/EU of 20 November 2014 setting up the organisational structure and operation for the European network for rural development and for the European Innovation Partnership network and repealing Decision 2008/168/EC¹,

Having regard to the standard rules of procedure of expert groups²,

HAS ADOPTED THE FOLLOWING RULES OF PROCEDURE:

Article 1

Scope

These rules of procedure complement the operation rules of the Assembly of the European network for rural development and of the European Innovation Partnership network (hereinafter referred to as 'the Assembly') as set up in Decision 2014/825/EU, for, amongst other, convening a meeting, the agenda, documents to be sent to Assembly members, proposals of the Assembly, minutes, professional secrecy.

Article 2

Convening a meeting

1. Meetings of the Assembly are convened by the Chair, either on its own initiative, or at the request of a simple majority of members after the Director General for Agriculture and Rural Development has given its agreement.

¹ OJ L 334 of 21.11.2014, p. 98.

² SEC (2010) 1360.

2. Joint meetings of the Assembly with other groups may be convened to discuss matters falling within their respective areas of responsibility.

Article 3

Agenda

1. The secretariat shall draw up the agenda under the responsibility of the Chair and send it to the members of the Assembly.
2. The agenda shall be adopted by the Assembly at the start of the meeting.

Article 4

Documents to be sent to Assembly members

1. The secretariat shall send the invitation to the meeting and the draft agenda to the Assembly members no later than thirty calendar days before the date of the meeting.
2. The secretariat shall send documents to be discussed by the Assembly to the Assembly members no later than seven calendar days before the date of the meeting.

Article 5

Proposals of the Assembly

1. As far as possible, the Assembly shall adopt its proposals or opinions by consensus.
2. In the event of a vote, the consensus is obtained by a simple majority of the members.

Article 6

Written procedure

1. If necessary, the Assembly's proposals or opinions on a specific question may be delivered via a written procedure. To this end, the secretariat sends the Assembly members the document(s) on which the Assembly is being consulted.
2. However, if a simple majority of Assembly members asks for the question to be examined at a meeting of the Assembly, the written procedure shall be terminated without result and the Chair shall convene a meeting of the Assembly as soon as possible.

Article 7

Secretariat

The Commission shall provide secretarial support for the Assembly and any sub-groups created under Article 5(2) of Decision 2014/825/EU.

Article 8

Summary minutes of the meetings

Summary minutes on the discussion on each point on the agenda shall be drafted by the secretariat under the responsibility of the Chair. The minutes shall not mention the individual position of the members during the Assembly's deliberations.

Article 9

Attendance list

At each meeting, the secretariat shall draw up, under the responsibility of the Chair, an attendance list specifying, where appropriate, the authorities, organisations or bodies to which the participants belong.

Article 10

Conflicts of interest

1. Should a conflict of interest in relation to a member arise, the Commission services may exclude this member from the Assembly or a particular meeting thereof or they may decide that the member in question shall abstain from discussing the items on the agenda concerned and from any vote on these items.
2. At the start of each meeting, any member whose participation in the Assembly's work would raise a conflict of interest shall inform the Chair.
3. Conflicts of interest shall be reported in writing, e.g. in the summary minutes of the Assembly's meeting.
4. Paragraphs 1, 2 and 3 shall also apply to deliberations taken by the Assembly in written procedure.

Article 11

Correspondence

1. Correspondence relating to the Assembly shall be addressed to the e-mail address provided by the Chair.
2. Correspondence for Assembly members shall be sent to the e-mail address which they provide for that purpose.

Article 12

Access to documents

Applications for access to documents held by the Assembly will be handled in accordance with Regulation (EC) No 1049/2001³ and detailed rules for its application⁴.

Article 13

Confidentiality of deliberations

The deliberations in the Assembly shall be non-confidential except if a simple majority of the members of the Assembly, after having heard the Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development, decides otherwise.

Article 14

Protection of personal data

All processing of personal data for the purposes of these rules of procedure shall be in accordance with Regulation (EC) No 45/2001⁵.

³ Regulation (EC) No 1049/2001 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 May 2001 regarding public access to European Parliament, Council and Commission documents (OJ L 145, 31.5.2002, p. 43).

⁴ Commission Decision 2001/937 of 5.12.2001 (OJ L 345 of 29.12.2001, p. 94).

⁵ Regulation (EC) 45/2001 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2000 on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data by the Community institutions and bodies and on the free movement of such data (OJ L 8, 12.1.2001, p. 1).

Annex II - Workshop Reports

Workshop 1: 'Better Networking with ENRD/EIP'

14.00 – 15.30

Objective

To identify specific activities the Networks should prioritise to ensure more effective participation – in particular, how various networks and European stakeholder organisations can best work together/ complement each other's work to fulfil this common objective.

Method



1. Introductory remarks by three contributors to help set the framework for the workshop's discussion;
2. Discussions in three groups on (1) stakeholder needs/issues & (2) networking channels & methods to address these
3. Presentation of key findings by the three groups & joint discussion on how European networking (ENRD/EIP) can complement the work of other networks & organisations?

Contributions

Speakers presented three different views on stakeholder needs and channels/methods, namely:

- Thomas Bertilsson (COPA-COGECA) presented from a 'farmer's perspective' the needs and channels for getting more involved in competitive agriculture,
- Trees Robijns (BirdLife) presented from an 'environmental NGO perspective' the needs and channels for getting more involved in sustainable management of natural resources;
- Radim Srsen (ELARD) presented from a LAG/local major perspective the needs and channels for getting more involved in territorial development.

Outcomes

The main outcomes of the workshop with regard to specific needs & channels and methods can be summarised as follows.

Needs and channels related to competitive agriculture:

- **MAAs: Focused information from EU level, simplification and clarity to better communicate with national stakeholders on the RDPs. Channels:** online forums (MAAs-EC, MAAs-MAAs, MAAs-Stakeholders), targeted working groups and thematic videoconferences.
- **NRNs: Clear information and capacity building, knowledge to share with farmers, support to participate in other networks besides RD networks in order to communicate with new stakeholders especially research community. Channels:** training, workshops, seminars, face-to-face meetings, FAQ, e-learning, e-studies, study visits, demonstrative projects on farms, website (interactive

Workshop 1: 'Better Networking with ENRD/EIP'

14.00 – 15.30

communication), social media in national languages, increasing involvement of farmers in the network.

- **Research: (1) different evaluation schemes to be able to work directly with farmers and (2) farmers' concerns to be traduced into clear research questions. Channels:** (1) Involvement of research "funders" in the network to value knowledge transfer as much as publications in evaluation process of research, (2) interface actors (advisory and innovation support services) are key to traduce farmers' needs into research questions.
- **Farmers: Awareness raising on young and new farmers' needs to allow MAs and older farmers to better understand the future competitiveness challenge for agriculture, risk management at farm level and simplification. Channels:** competence development, market information, new management tools, methods, less rules.
- **EU NGOs: (1) clear explanation of benefits to participate: why to join and (2) provision of practical and relevant information on how to participate in correct language. Channels:** (1) dissemination of info and benefits for involvement through EU-level organisations and networks, more advice on national level, (2) national contact points should provide practical advice – detailed info and existing examples.

Needs and channels related to the sustainable management of natural resources:

- **Awareness raising & presenting clear benefits of sustainable management of natural resources for farmers** to create a balance between productivity and environmentally-friendly farming. **Channels:** Working with 'green-hearted' farmers including semi-subsistence, extensive and organic farmers. Farmer advisors and NGOs are good channels for raising awareness. Emphasising positive aspects/gains from their involvement. Farmer-to-farmer practical exchanges. Thematic working groups for sharing information.
- **Overcoming the financial and other resource constraints of environmental NGOs. Channels:** Involvement of NGOs, listen to their views, share information with them in a timely way, extend invitations to formal meetings.
- **Practical research for farmers. Channels:** Engaging with farmers' advisors to spread practical results to make a difference on the ground.

Workshop 1: 'Better Networking with ENRD/EIP'

14.00 – 15.30

Needs and channels related to territorial development:

- **Engaging with ethnic minorities** (e.g. in Sweden) and Roma people (e.g. in the Czech Republic) and involve them in the development of rural areas. **Channels:** 'Match-making' in terms of finding employment opportunities, social services for minority people; encouraging national immigration organisations and local authorities to get involved as well as LAGs to include minority representatives.
- **Offering a perspective for the future to local people** (formal requirements – e.g. with regard to LAG strategy - are often restrictive in this regard). **Channels:** Bottom-up, integrated strategy can reflect future perspectives.
- **Consumer groups** need to be more involved to enhance the awareness about food quality, environmental services by farmers, etc. **Channels:** Awareness-raising activities, especially about local services (including information to schools, universities).
- **Addressing the problem of high unemployment rate and low education** (school drop-outs). **Channel:** Knowledge-network for young people. University projects (e.g. in Croatia) on agricultural processes.
- **Creating better communication between different ministries/policies.** Platforms for exchange. 'Rural Connector' based on data-analysis linking supply and demand for people sharing similar issues.

Common areas where ENRD/EIP can contribute the most:

- **Exchanging good practices** useful examples (e.g. on environmental practices, addressing minority issues, etc.)
- **Communication**, e.g. communicating the long-term benefits of sustainable management of natural resources. Among others showing a 'perspective to the future' (e.g. rural areas as source of innovation).
- **Thematic work:** creating forums for exchange/platforms among key stakeholders. Among others, EU level could encourage sectoral interests to come together.

Workshop 2: 'Farmers in Innovation'

14.00 – 15.30

Summary

About 30 people participated in this workshop in a varied group of stakeholders, where they were asked to reflect on how to further involve farmers in the EU Networks (ENRD and EIP-AGRI).

The results of the discussions in the group were relevant, comprising varied aspects from suggestions on several types of communication channels to the relevance of peer-to-peer learning. The group also highlighted the importance of communicating to farmers that innovation in agriculture is actually an opportunity to solve problems in farming. Furthermore, participants also discussed on how stakeholders in EU Networks can contribute to involve farmers, suggesting that they can support the exchange of good practices, translate information to national language or make information circulate faster (reaching local level), just to mention a few. Besides, the group considered that getting better access to concrete and relevant information and having the chance of having a role in identifying priorities in research agenda topics are some of the benefits that farmers get when involved in the EU Networks, among others.

Contributions and method

About 30 people participated in workshop 2, constituting a participative group of representatives from varied types of stakeholders such as advisory services, research institutes, paying agencies, managing authorities, NRNs and RD Civil Dialogue Group.

In order to better establish a dialogue between farmers and research community, we need to involve both types of stakeholders in the EU Networks. To start with and since time was limited, we proposed participants to focus on farmers and requested them to discuss over four questions:

“In order to further involve farmers in the EU Networks (EIP-AGRI and ENRD):

- Q 1 - What could be effective communication channels for the EU Networks to use?
- Q 2 - What should be main messages to address?
- Q 3 - How can stakeholders in EU Networks contribute to this?
- Q 4 - What benefits for the farmers should the EU Networks highlight?”

The group was divided in four subgroups according to their typology: advisors, researchers, (active at) policy level and a mixed subgroup. The first two discussed questions nr. 2 and 4 and the last two subgroups discussed the other two questions. Then, the whole group was brought together again, the results were presented, discussed and prepared to be reported back to the RD Assembly.

Workshop 2: 'Farmers in Innovation'

14.00 – 15.30

Outcomes

QUESTION 1: What could be effective communication channels for the EU Networks to use?

- Use and exploit existing national, regional networks and their channels
- Use simple language
- Use differentiated communication channels according to generations (older *versus* younger farmers)
- Use an approach according to stakeholders' capacity to change (innovative stakeholders, flexible ones, non-innovative ones)
- Consider list of possible channels: agricultural magazines, one to one meetings, events (workshops, seminars, conferences), internet, social media info, new apps (simple tools for info), social networks, video clips, media, field practices (at regional level), a Technical Transfer Office (demand *versus* offer for innovation), discussion groups for farmers (at regional level), Thematic Networks for better linkage with Horizon 2020, an open EIP database providing solutions to problems and good practices, etc.

QUESTION 2: What should be main messages to address?

- Communicate that there's clear benefit for farmers for being part of network: opportunities to solve their problems (financial, technological, etc.)
- Use local facilitator to facilitate the process – "local language"
- Tell farmers that they are part of a group of people with the same problems
- Create opportunities / tools for farmers to learn from each other (actor group): farmers learn from other farmers the best
- Have a dialogue with farmers before making/improving networks – collect their needs (face to face meetings, surveys), potentially also collect „primary data“
- Promote the visualisation of results (pilot demonstration) – explained by farmers, in actual farm
- Highlight the importance of the innovations for farmers
- Illustrate a broader understanding of innovation: different types of innovations, not only technical
- Communicate on farmers' social role (environmental protection, etc.)
- Make farmers aware that mixed groups communication works the best (researchers, advisors, farmers organisation working together on same problem) - involve whole rural community not only farmers

Workshop 2: 'Farmers in Innovation'

14.00 – 15.30

GROUP 3: How can stakeholders in EU Networks contribute?

- There's a general need for a better knowledge about who farmers are
- Stakeholders use / develop communication channels such as: social media (consider age, access to internet), TV, video guidelines, seminars, focus groups, e-mail
- There's a general need to provide targeted information (avoid "noise", exact requirements)
- Develop IT systems (e.g. automatic translation options)
- Stakeholders support the exchange of good practices
- Stakeholders can translate information to national language
- Stakeholders can make information circulate faster
- Stakeholders may contribute to identify priorities in research agenda

GROUP 4: What benefits for the farmers should the EU Networks highlight?

- Get access to concrete information: farmers need concrete responses to their problems
- Get access to relevant information: best practices in advisory services
- Become aware that they also are EU citizens (via support from EU)
- Access to clearer and more accessible information via peer to peer communication (other farmers involved in networking)
- Get involved in networks as tools of exchanging information between different actors: become active in a co-operation circle involving farmers, researchers and advisors
- Get access to more information due to regional co-operation
- Get access to broader information (namely bio-economy related)

Can have a role in identifying priorities in research agenda topics

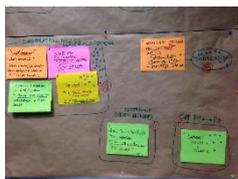
Workshops 3&4: 'Networking Priorities'

14.00 – 15.30

Objective

To identify which priority themes the EU Networks should address (whether these be sectoral or horizontal) and how EU networking can address these.

Method



1. Introductory remarks by two contributors to help set the framework for the workshop's discussion;
2. A twinning method to encourage and enable participant to discuss and identify priority themes in pairs, then groups of four, then groups of eight.
3. Priorities fed back to the whole workshop.
4. Each delegate voted for their three priority themes, which were grouped into clusters.

Contributions

- 2 short presentations were delivered by:
- Veronika Madner (Austrian Managing Authority); and
 - Goran Šoster (Slovenian LAG).

Outcomes

Following voting by the 41 participants (up to three votes each), the top five priority challenges/theme areas identified were:

1. **Management and performance** - (26 votes) - Currently the objectives of certain measures are becoming more and more specific but the more complex the programme is the higher the risk of errors.
What can networking do? Networks are useful for learning from good previous experiences. Good practices can improve the management of programmes, learning how - by exchange of experience and advisory support - measures can be more easily implemented.
2. **Simplification** - (25 votes) - there is large scope for simplification, and in particular simplifying financial support systems offering beneficiaries different cost options. Simplification for all types of LEADER projects under EUR 100 000 was raised in this respect.
What can networking do? Share best practices and increase understanding of the opportunities offered by simplified cost options, both for administrators and beneficiaries.
3. **Addressing demographic challenges** – (23 votes) - Working with young people, young entrepreneurs in rural areas, training and education for young people and umbrella projects with small-scale projects under it to make it easier for young people to start new projects. The impact of demographic challenges is not only an issue of young people, but also relating to ageing, both in rural and urban populations.

Workshops 3&4: 'Networking Priorities'

14.00 – 15.30

What can networking do? Create exchanges and good practices related to measures and policies on youth in rural areas including with young farmers and young entrepreneurs

4. **Collaborative diversification** – (18 votes) - farmers and landowners working together to support multiple use across territories towards better use of available resources. So diversifying the economy is not only about farming, but also working together.

What can networking do? Bring people together (including MAs, PAs etc.) to understand and solve problems. Facilitate forms of co-operation.

5. **Monitoring and evaluation** - (14 votes) - CLLD is a new approach so support will need to be provided for M&E of multi-funded strategies from the ESIF. Crucially, there should be flexibility on assessing or evaluating LAGs.

What can networking do? Exchange, promote practices on evaluation, provide support to LAGs towards M&E, self-assessment.

Other priority areas mentioned during the feedback, given lower 'voting' responses were as follows:

6. Strengthening advisory and information services to farmers and rural entrepreneurs (10 votes)
7. Biodiversity (8 votes)
8. Local Food (6 votes)
9. Linkages between Pillar 1 and Pillar 2 (6 votes)
10. Addressing rural – urban linkages (4 votes)

Multi-fund approaches were raised as an important cross-cutting issue linked to some of the priorities listed above.

The workshop highlighted that it is essential to communicate results of RDP implementation, and this includes failure.

Workshop 5: 'What should come first in Innovation'

14.00 – 15.30

Summary



Contributions and method

The workshop purpose was to identify priority themes for innovation to increase productivity and sustainability in agriculture and forestry, and discuss how the participants could contribute to addressing these.

The introduction included some reflections on the subgroup for innovation, and presented the priority themes identified by the High Level Steering Board in the EIP-AGRI strategic implementation plan, as well as the 8 themes that resulted from a thorough analysis and clustering of the 109 potential focus group topics that were received through the EIP-AGRI website.

The participants discussed these themes in 4 groups, and they came up with 11 additional priority topics. In the subsequent prioritization exercise, 6 of these additional topics were selected.

Finally the whole group discussed and shared ideas for activities and specific actions to address these themes, and these were also reported to the Assembly plenary session.

The workshop outcome was a collection of priority topics for innovation and ideas for action for the participants. These results can now serve a base for work of the Assembly subgroup on innovation.

Koen Desimpelaere of the EIP-AGRI Service point welcomed the participants and guided them through a short introduction to using the electronic voting system, by asking three questions on the participants' links to farming and forestry. Around one third of the participants had been born in a farming family, 80 percent had ever worked on a farm or in forestry, and one was currently involved in farming or forestry.

In her brief presentation, Pilar Gumma of DGAGRI noted that the High Level Steering Board mandate was the EIP-AGRI Strategic Implementation Plan, which was now finalised and to be implemented. She also spoke on the setting up of the Rural Networks Assembly subgroup on innovation, which is expected to meet for the first time in March. Ms Gumma subsequently introduced the participants to the workshop tasks, presenting the 16 innovation priorities that had been identified in the EIP-AGRI Strategic Implementation Plan, and the 8 priority thematic clusters that resulted from a thorough analysis of the 109 proposals for EIP-AGRI Focus Group topics received through the EIP-AGRI website. She asked the participants to identify any missing priorities, to prioritise the themes, and to reflect on how to address them.

The participants split up into four groups to discuss the priority themes presented, and what they felt should be added. They reported back on their additional themes, 11 in total. They also correctly pointed out that some further clustering should be done to combine the lists. The whole group then voted on the resulting 35 themes as follows. The themes were presented in three batches of 9 themes and one of 8, taking care that in each batch there were no two comparable themes. For every batch, the participants then

Workshop 5: 'What should come first in Innovation'

14.00 – 15.30

Outcomes

selected their two top themes, using the voting system. The results were immediately presented on screen.

Finally, the whole group discussed how the participants, and their organisations could contribute to addressing these themes, focussing on types of activities and concrete actions. To do this, they first briefly discussed with their neighbours and then presented their ideas to the whole group. The Assembly subgroup on innovation can use these lists of priority topics as a base for further work.

In addition to reviewing and enriching the topics identified in the EIP-AGRI strategic implementation plan and those received via the EIP-AGRI website, the participants identified the following 11 new topics:

- Bottom up innovation in the knowledge system
- Market innovation
- Policy innovation
- Financial viability & feasibility
- Political impact
- Knowledge transfer
- Social innovation (marketing skills of farmers etc.)
- Financial instruments
- Soil quality
- Circular economy
- Energy efficiency

In the prioritization exercise, the following 12 topics received most of the votes (out of 35) the total figures for all the voting results are attached:

- Sustainable and efficient input use
- Knowledge transfer
- Circular economy
- Farming methods and systems
- Bottom up innovation in the knowledge system
- Market innovation
- Knowledge systems
- Short supply chains and rural-urban partnerships
- Waste management
- Social innovation (improving farmers' marketing skills etc.)
- Climate change (adaptation and mitigation)
- Soil quality

Additional topics which also received many votes were: energy efficiency, food production and processing, sustainable consumption, young/new farmers, policy innovation, bioeconomy, network of innovative farms, and water.

The participants shared the following ideas for action:

Workshop 5: 'What should come first in Innovation'

14.00 – 15.30

- Seminars / webinars – sharing best and bad practices – learning from successes and mistakes
- Working with LEADER Local Action Groups as a communication channel
- Sustainable partnerships – more interaction between farmers and other stakeholders
- Pilot projects / connecting farmers' needs with research work - eg operational groups on soil quality
- Innovation needs in marketing: developing new business models with and for farmers
- Optimise money for innovation by connecting H2020 and RDP innovation, and involving farmers in H2020
- Innovative farm network – farmer to farmer communication with scientific advice, such as the French Agr'Innovation network
- H2020 thematic networks, e.g. on organic arable farming to be set up soon – also involving farmers, and sharing best practice from research and farm experience

Workshop 6: 'Better communication with stakeholders'

14.00 – 15.30

Objective

To identify priority communication activities for the European Rural Networks to complement stakeholders' existing awareness raising activities.

Method

1. Introductory remarks by two contributors to help set the framework for the workshop's discussion;
2. Brainstorming on important rural development communication priorities – participants posted their ideas on three boards covering: target groups; messages; and channels;
3. Twinning methodology: participants discussed and defined priority activities for the European rural networks – in pairs, then groups of four, then groups of eight. The workshop discussed the findings of each group to narrow down a final list of shared priorities.

Contributions



Martina Stupar, Slovenian Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry & Food

The Ministry's key communication priorities include: improving understanding of the RDP and project funding; promoting co-operation; spreading good practices; and highlighting the benefits of the RDP. The main difficulty in realising these priorities relates to effectively targeting the relevant stakeholders with the right information.

European Rural Networks can add value by collecting and disseminating NRNs' materials and activities, assisting in promoting international co-operation and providing online platforms for peer discussion and exchange.

Luis Chaves – Minha Terra Network, Portugal

The main challenge is communicating complex messages around rural development to the three different principal stakeholder groups: decision-makers; local development actors; and the broader public.

The main need from the European Rural Networks relates to disseminating the NRNs' messages (in national languages).

Outcomes

Participants identified three main **categories of target group**:

- **Farmers**, forest owners and other potential project beneficiaries
- **Decision and opinion makers** (including politicians, administrators, researchers, associations and interest groups)
- **Broader public** (including students, teachers & marginalised groups).

Key **messages to be communicated** included:

- Guidelines on **accessing the available funds**, eligibility criteria etc.
- Information on the **NRN**: how it works; how to join etc.
- **Evaluation results** on reaching RDP objectives
- **Good practices** and innovative projects
- Information on the **benefits of RD policy**.

Workshop 6: 'Better communication with stakeholders' 14.00 – 15.30

The following **communication channels** are important:

- **Traditional channels:** including websites; publications; newsletters, leaflets; promotional events, workshops, mass mailings
- **Modern channels:** including social media (Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, online forums), E-news and web TV, SMS notifications
- **Multipliers:** national and local media (print, radio, TV), stakeholders' organisations, Rural Networks

The priority **actions for the EU Rural networks** can be classified under the following main categories:

- **Simpler to understand**
 - o Production of easy-to-understand guides, summaries and short videos – on latest developments in rural development policy and practice;
 - o Produce syntheses of outputs (ENRD, EU etc.), summarising key information contained within legislation, thematic reports, technical documents etc;
 - o Support translation of information into different languages
- **Spread good practice**
 - o Identify good practice in terms of projects and also approaches to RDP implementation across countries;
 - o Also: practice that does not work (lessons learnt);
 - o Provide easy-to-search database of good practices, searchable by country, theme etc.
- **Support bottom-up communication**
 - o Communication flows should not be just top-down;
 - o Support the collection, dissemination and sharing of relevant activities of LAGs and other stakeholders on the ground – as well as EU and national organisations/associations.
- **Support peer exchange**
 - o Develop and raise awareness of forums for exchange of good practice, experiences and opinions.
- **Increased focus on dissemination**
 - o Producing and making tools and materials available is not always enough;
 - o Communicate about the tools/materials/resources available;
 - o Support ongoing dissemination of information.

