

RDP II

2007-2013

Flemish Government - Agriculture and Fisheries Policy Area

Vlaamse overheid



Departement
Landbouw en Visserij





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Preface

Dear Reader,

Quite some ink, energy and time have been invested in the elaboration of the European rural development policy as the second pillar of the Common Agricultural Policy. Already in 2003, the European Union started inquiring among its Member States how they envisaged the practice of this policy after 2006. At that time, Flanders already had several years of positive experience with RDP I and Leader. Therefore, there was no doubt that the continuation of this policy could offer Flemish agriculture and horticulture an added value. At the same time, we are also convinced that we must respond to environmental topics and to new challenges and opportunities for the Flemish countryside.

To us, maximum continuity was of crucial importance, and this is what we have achieved by joining forces. In the new Rural Development Programme (RDP) the emphasis on the economic activities of agriculture and horticulture within the rural development policy remains. 60% of EU resources go to those activities, which makes us a positive exception within the EU. Nevertheless, even from this economically-oriented approach, there is strong emphasis on the environmental aspect, both in Axis 1 (environmental investments, awareness campaigns, business advisory system) and in Axis 2 (agri-environmental measures).

This policy of axes will be illustrated clearly further on in the brochure. In this new RDP II, the involvement of the provinces will be increased, especially through the development of a more area-oriented rural policy and the implementation of broader rural projects. The new Leader policy certainly constitutes a challenge in this sense.

The Agriculture and Fisheries policy area is ready to commit itself, across policy area boundaries, in collaboration with the different levels of government and in close consultation with the sector, so that EU and Flemish resources are spent as much as possible, and in the best possible way, for the benefit of the agriculture and horticulture sectors and the rural actors. In addition, the Flemish Rural Network, which has been set up within the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, is ready to support the rural development policy.

The Agriculture and Fisheries policy area commits itself with this RDP II to be a **reliable** partner in close cooperation with the Office of the Minister responsible for Agriculture.

Jules Van Liefferinge,

Secretary-General of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries

Chairman of the RDP II Implementation Committee

The European rural development framework

Over the past decades, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has evolved considerably. Whereas initially the emphasis was only on tackling structural problems in the agricultural sector, over the years the attention paid to the different roles of agriculture in society has increased. The Rural Development Policy, which was started in 2000 as the second pillar of the CAP, was a step in this direction.

The European Rural Development Policy for 2007-2013 also continues to refer to agriculture and the countryside in a broader context. The new Regulation (EC) no. 1698/2005 is characterised by both continuity and change. There is continuity in the fact that once again a 'menu' of measures is being offered from which the Member States can choose, and for which they receive financial support. What is new is that common policy objectives have been agreed upon:

- improving the competitiveness of agriculture and forestry (Axis 1);
- improving the environment and the countryside by supporting land management (Axis 2);
- improving the quality of life in rural areas and encouraging diversification of economic activity (Axis 3).

Each of the three central objectives corresponds to a thematic axis in the rural development programmes. These three axes are complemented with a methodological axis dedicated to the Leader approach (Axis 4).

For each axis the EU requires minimum financing, which has to ensure that the whole programme is well-balanced (10% for Axis 1, 25% for Axis 2, 10% for Axis 3 and 5% for the Leader Axis).

The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) is responsible for the European co-financing of the programmes elaborated by the Member States. In the table the EAFRD contributions per Member State are listed for the period 2007-2013.



Belgium	418.610.306
Czech Republic	2.815.506.354
Denmark	444.660.796
Germany	8.112.517.055
Estonia	714.658.855
Greece	3.707.304.424
Spain	7.213.917.799
France	6.441.965.109
Ireland	2.339.914.590
Italy	8.292.009.883
Cyprus	162.523.574
Latvia	1.041.113.504
Lithuania	1.743.360.093
Luxembourg	90.037.826
Hungary	3.805.843.392
Malta	76.633.355
Netherlands	486.521.167
Austria	3.911.469.992
Poland	13.230.038.156
Portugal	3.929.325.028
Slovenia	900.266.729
Slovakia	1.969.418.078
Finland	2.079.932.907
Sweden	1.825.647.954
United Kingdom	1.909.574.420

euro

Flemish Rural Development Programme 2007-2013

The Flemish Rural Development Programme for the period 2007-2013 (RDP II) was officially submitted to the European Commission on 8 December 2006 and approved on 13 November 2007.

The strategic document outlines the rural development policy for the period 2007-2013. Both this strategy and the programme are the result of collaboration with all socio-economic partners.

The following view was defined:

The Flemish countryside is characterised by a good quality of life for all actors in a strongly urbanised environment with a multifunctional use of space in which agriculture is an important user of open space and a significant force.

Through sustainable investment in the different functions of the countryside the position and the importance of the countryside are reinforced and new opportunities are created for those functions of the countryside which determine its structure and identity (sustainable agriculture and horticulture, rural heritage, environment, forest, nature, landscape,...). The Flemish agricultural sector produces quality products in a sustainable manner, for instance by continuing the conversion to

sustainable agriculture, including organic farming; it uses renewable raw materials, aims for maximum conservation of biodiversity and is economically sustainable. We recognise and support the professionalism in the agricultural sector. Flemish agriculture operates as one of the multifunctional players in the countryside and aims to collaborate with all partners.

In line with this view, a mission has been defined and for each axis strategic objectives have been formulated. In addition, three horizontal strategic objectives were established.

- Through a continuous exchange and building up of knowledge within a chain which aims at maximum transparency and cooperation, agricultural entrepreneurship obtains a stronger position within the chain;
- The management of the RDP guarantees an optimal allocation of resources and measures and maximum mutual coordination with other Flemish policy initiatives;
- The RDP makes a considerable contribution to the sustainable development of the countryside, including a sustainable spatial development.

The programme is based on 4 axes, which have been defined within the European framework.

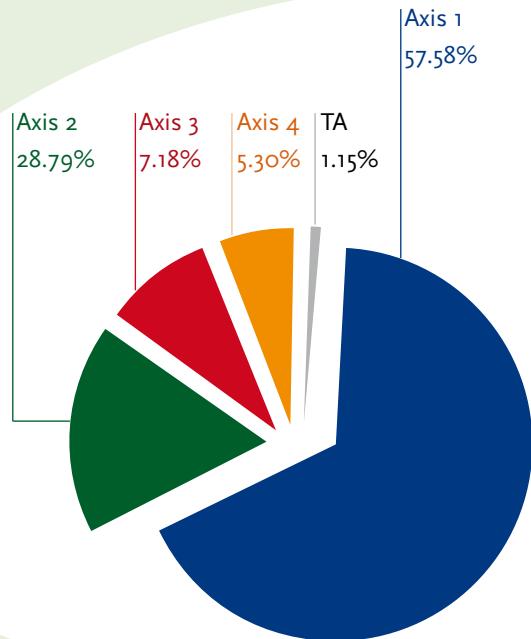
- **Axis 1:** improving the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sector;
- **Axis 2:** improving the environment and the countryside;
- **Axis 3:** quality of life in rural areas and diversification of the rural economy;
- **Axis 4:** Leader.

The total public funding for the RDP amounts to 779.835.263 euros. Of this amount, 555.314.554 euros or 71.21% is contributed by Flanders, and the remaining balance (224.520.709 euros) by the European Union. The distribution of the total public funding over the axes is reflected in the figure below. The European Union co-financing is determined per axis. For Axes 1, 3 and 4 this is 30% each, for Axis 2 25% and for technical assistance 50%.

Because the programme is a continuation of RDP I, which ran from 2000 to 2006, some commitments which still require payments are automatically transferred to RDP II. This results in a situation where certain measures (e.g. infrastructure development) are not continued in RDP II, but do appear

in the programme and the corresponding financial table. As these are not open to tenders anymore via RDP II, these extinguishing measures will not be discussed further in this brochure.

*TA= technical assistance



For further information on the general programme or its specific measures, please contact:
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This table gives an overview of the total public aid which has been allocated to the measures for the entire programme period 2007-2013.

euro

Axis 1	449.041.417
Agricultural training and awareness campaigns on sustainable agriculture	37.561.693
Establishment of young farmers	48.035.867
Business advisory system for farmers and horticulturists	18.976.540
Investments in agricultural businesses	282.737.974
Increasing the added value of agricultural and forestry products	28.874.403
Infrastructure development*	373.280
Participation of farmers in food quality schemes	32.099.273
Information on and sales promotion of Flemish products certified as PDO/PGI/TSG	382.387

* *extinguishing measure*

Axis 2	224.520.708
LFA other than mountain areas	6.188.832
Natura 2000 payments	5.226.124
Agri-environmental payments	201.931.596
Non-productive investments agriculture	1.120.128
First afforestation of agricultural land	5.428.416
Non-productive investments forests	4.625.612

euro

Axis 3	56.015.113
Diversification into non-agricultural activities	21.674.061
Encouragement of tourism activities	4.466.817
Basic services for the economy	5.232.230
Village renewal and development	9.516.850
Conservation of the rural heritage	14.153.637
Training and information	971.520

Axis 4 - Leader	41.277.197
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Technical assistance	8.980.828
Total public aid	779.835.263

AXIS 1

Improving the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sector

Objectives:

Investment in – among other things – innovation, knowledge, chain management, structural improvements, quality and standard compliance enhances the competitiveness of the Flemish agricultural, horticultural and forestry sectors.

Encouraging young, qualified farmers to establish themselves contributes to the continuity in the sector, to innovation and to improved competitiveness.

The stimulation of sustainable investment in the agri-food sector, which is firmly rooted in Flemish agriculture, reinforces the competitiveness of agriculture and the agri-food sector and increases employment in rural areas.

The stimulation of improved quality creates opportunities to differentiate oneself compared to products with a basic quality.

Agricultural training

With this action the Flemish government wants to offer people who work in agriculture an opportunity to take part in permanent training by attending courses and short training activities. The action also comprises courses and practical training for starters in agriculture with insufficient previous training. The promotion of sustainable agriculture and horticulture and professionalism are central themes.

The courses are organised by non-profit organisations whose mission it is to organise after-school educational activities. In addition, the organisations must be recognised as general or regional organisations by the Sustainable Agricultural Development division of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Before 1 November of each operating year the recognised centres must submit a global annual programme, including a budget, which has to be approved by the Flemish Minister of Agriculture. This forms the basis for the activities which will be organised for farmers and horticulturist during the operating year.

Additionally, incentives are given directly to the farmers. Farmers who successfully finish a course cycle of at least 75 hours within a period of 5 years can apply for a social promotion grant of 6 euros per hour of class.



Awareness campaigns on sustainable agriculture

When innovative sustainable practices and techniques are ready to leave the research phase, it is important to put them into practice as soon as possible. That is why awareness projects with the objective of encouraging farmers and horticulturists to apply more sustainable agricultural techniques are supported by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Every year the Sustainable Agricultural Development division launches a call. Possible topics are e.g.:

- alternative and renewable energy sources;
- rational energy consumption;
- decrease in the emission of crop protection agents into the environment;
- decrease in the emission of nutrients into the environment;
- diversification;
- organic farming;
- integrated agriculture;
- innovative practices and crops.

Only organisations recognised by the Flemish government as 'centres for awareness-building towards a more sustainable agriculture' can submit projects. In order to obtain this recognition they have to prove that they are non-profit organisations, and that they have experience with the planning and organisation of awareness projects. The grant covers all project costs.



Setting up of young farmers

In recent years, the number of subsidised first setting up in Flemish agriculture is around 200 per year. A slight increase can be seen. Nevertheless, it remains risky to establish oneself, among other reasons because of the size of the capital investment per business, the limited profitability, the long pay-back periods in the agricultural sector and the need for a full income for the family.

The aim of this measure is to convert potential establishments in the agricultural sector into actual establishments as much as possible in order to guarantee the continuity of agricultural activity in Flanders, and to ensure that the sector remains dynamic enough to solve structural problems.

Eligibility depends on the following conditions:

- the farmer or horticulturist is younger than 40;
- he/she fulfils the minimum requirements regarding specific training to run an agricultural business;

- the business complies with the minimum standards regarding viability, profitability and good agricultural practices;
- the business complies with the minimum standards regarding the environment, hygiene and animal welfare;
- the business does its bookkeeping;
- sufficient production and emission rights are available;
- the sale of the produce is realistic;
- the investments which determine viability have been made;
- a business plan is submitted.

The aid is granted by the Flemish Agricultural Investment Fund in the form of a capital incentive and an interest rate subsidy. The capitalised value of the interest rate subsidy amounts to a maximum of 30.000 euros; the capital incentive to a maximum of 50% of the first 50.000 euros of the costs of setting up.

Business advisory system for farmers and horticulturists

Farmers who apply for a single farm payment scheme are inspected to see if they fulfil the compliances. The business advisory system gives farmers and horticulturists the opportunity to receive subsidised advice which can help them to comply with these compliances. Horticulturists can also apply for the advice subsidy as the legislation on which the compliances are based also applies to them. In addition, the business advisory system can assist farmers and horticulturists to assess and reduce the risks present in their businesses with respect to safety at work.

Broader advice on economic and environmental business performance is also part of this measure.

The different consultancy topics have been divided into 5 modules:

- module 1: environment, good agricultural and environmental condition
- module 2: plant health, public health
- module 3: animal health, animal welfare, public health
- module 4: safety at work
- module 5: business optimisation
 - module 5.1: business-economic and environmental parameters
 - module 5.2: marketing advice.

The advice is required to comprise all modules; only module 5.2 is optional.

Every 2 years, a farmer or horticulturist can apply for a subsidy of up to 1.500 euros which represents a maximum of 80% of the cost of the advice.

The necessary advice must be requested within two years.



Investments in agricultural businesses

Farmers and horticulturists are almost constantly confronted with new developments which influence the operation and the profitability of their business. In order to stay up to date and maintain or improve profitability, investments are usually necessary.

With its investment support the Flemish government wants to encourage farmers and horticulturists to adapt quickly to changed circumstances.

A range of investments is eligible for the subsidy, the amount of which depends on the investment.

The highest amount is reserved for innovative and/or sustainable investments or investments which reduce the burden on the environment.

The general conditions in order to be eligible for investment support are:

- the operators of the business must be sufficiently qualified;
- the business must be viable;
- the business must comply with the minimum standards regarding the environment, hygiene and animal welfare, and the production must be organised in such a way that a positive result

is obtained with respect to these minimum standards;

- there must be a certain guarantee for the sale of the produce.

There are four possible degrees of support, namely 10, 20, 30 and 40%, and the support will be given in the form of a capital incentive and/or an interest rate subsidy. The support for investments in agriculture is provided by the Flemish Agricultural Investment Fund.



Increasing the added value of agricultural and forestry products

The primary agri-food sector, as the first link in the processing and marketing of agricultural and horticultural products, is confronted with new developments every day.

In order to improve and rationalise the processing and marketing of agricultural and horticultural products investment support is given to the primary agri-food sector. These investments lead to an increase in the added value of the agricultural and horticultural products and an improvement of the sector's competitive position.

Which sectors are eligible for support?

Meat and meat products, small livestock and eggs,

dairy, vegetables and fruit, non-edible horticultural products, grains, sowing seeds and seedlings, potatoes, industrial vegetables (flax, hop, chicory and rapeseed), organic products, alternative products (farm products, regional products and medicinal plants).

The application of this measure will take place via calls by means of ministerial circular letters, in which it will be made public which sector(s) specifically qualify for the call. The calls will be published in the Belgian Official Journal and notified via press reports in the specialised press and via interest groups of the sectors in question. The details, the conditions and the maximum amount of support will be mentioned in the circular letter.

The support will be granted in the form of a capital incentive, to be paid out in one or more instalments. The support may amount to a maximum of 20% of the subsidisable investment.



Participation of farmers in food quality schemes

The promotion of quality is an essential aspect of the new approach within the EU when it comes to agriculture. Consumers associate quality not only with factors concerning the product as such, but also with the circumstances in which a product is produced.

In order to offer a quality guarantee for a specific product or production process, to increase the added value of primary agricultural products and to create more market opportunities, the Flemish government considers it necessary to encourage farmers and horticulturists to take part in food quality schemes.

This measure comprises 2 parts.

In **part A** support is granted in exchange for participation in the community's food quality scheme in the framework of Regulation 2092/91 on organic production. The support to be granted will be calculated on the basis of the farmer's actual costs connected to the participation in the organic production method and the control costs. Per business there is a maximum contribution of 3.000 euros per year, and this for 5 years.

In **part B** producers who produce according to certain specifications linked to the community's recognised food quality schemes are supported. It concerns products certified as **Traditional Speciality Guaranteed (TSG), Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) and Protected Designation of Origin (PDO)**.

Here as well, the 5-yearly support is calculated based on the costs of participation and the extra control costs resulting from the imposed standards.

This measure will not start at the beginning of the programme.

Information on and sales promotion of Flemish products certified as PDO/PGI/TSG

Flanders has quite a few typical high-quality regional products (both agricultural and food products). Producers of a certain regional product who join together in a producers' association can submit an application for registration with a view to obtaining the European certification for the quality systems Protected Designation of Origin (PDO), Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) and Traditional Speciality Guaranteed (TSG). For a producers' association, such certification is the first step towards the improvement of its market opportunities.

In a second phase it is important to promote these products with a European certification. Producers' associations with a limited number of members often have insufficient means to promote their quality products. The granting of a subsidy is to allow producers' associations to set up actions aimed at enhancing sales and providing information.

Costs which qualify are e.g. the organisation of and participation in fairs and expositions, PR activities, ads in the printed press (magazines, newspapers, ...), printed matter (folders, brochures, ...), electronic

media (websites, ...), information and demonstrations at the sales points, advertising via audiovisual media (TV and radio),

Public aid is limited to a maximum of 70% of the total cost, with an annual ceiling of 50.000 euros per producers' association. Subsidy applications can be made for up to three consecutive years.

This measure will not start at the beginning of the programme period.



AXIS 2

Improving the environment and the countryside

Objectives

By performing green and blue services the agricultural sector contributes to the achievement of environmental and nature objectives.

Encourage farmers who make a contribution to the objectives in the framework of the implementation of the Water Framework Directive and to the conservation objectives of the special protection areas (part of Natura 2000).

The encouragement of a sustainable use and expansion of the forested surface area contributes to the multifunctional development of the Flemish countryside.

The encouragement of organic farming and an innovative knowledge flow from organic farming to traditional agriculture increases the sustainability of Flemish agriculture.

Compensation payments within and outside Natura 2000

In areas with environmental limitations, the 'vulnerable natural areas', the Flemish Region imposes stricter standards compared to the rest of the agrarian structure. In these areas, which are valuable because of their nature, the Flemish legislation imposes a fertilisation ban. The idea is to stimulate nature development in these areas and obtain a better environmental quality.

- not use any crop protection agents, with the exception of local protection against thistles;
- keep a grazing register for all land which is grazed.

The amount of the subsidy is up to 150 euros/ha/year.

The conditions in order to participate in the measure are the following:

- be a farmer with one or more parcels of land in use in the vulnerable natural area subject to the fertilisation ban;
- request the nature subsidy at the time of registration of the parcel;
- have the parcel in use from 1 January through 31 December;
- continue the agricultural activity in the area for at least five years from the first payment;



Agri-environmental commitments

The Flemish government offers a number of agri-environmental commitments with the intention to adapt agricultural production to certain environmental and nature objectives.

Some of these commitments are related to the reduction of the use of fertilisers and crop protection agents, others enhance the protection of flora and fauna on land used for agriculture. Commitments to tackle erosion at parcel level are also being made.

In theory, parcels are fixed for the duration of the commitment. For some measures, especially those referring to cultivation techniques, parcels can be

changed annually. In the description below this is indicated explicitly for every measure.

In order to obtain a subsidy for agri-environmental commitments the farmer has to comply with 'cross-compliances'. These are the conditions for obtaining payment entitlements.

In addition, the farmer also has to comply with the legal requirements regarding the use of fertilisers and crop protection agents.

In order to achieve greater effectiveness as to environmental or nature objectives, certain agri-environmental commitments can be combined. The measures which can be mutually combined have been determined by the Flemish government.

The commitments are taken on for a period of 5 years. In certain cases the possibility will be offered to extend these commitments to 7 years.



Mechanical weed control

In Flemish agriculture and horticulture most crops are kept free from weeds with the help of crop protection agents. However, it is possible to keep certain crops weed-free via mechanical weed control. The elimination of the use of chemical crop protection agents has an immediate positive effect on the environment. The quality of soil and water improve, and the biodiversity of the parcel and its surroundings increases as well.

When can a farmer receive the subsidy of up to 250 euros/ha?

If he/she complies with the following conditions:

- make a commitment to keep at least half a hectare of agricultural crops free from weeds for 5 consecutive years using only mechanical weed control techniques;
- the parcels may be interchanged annually. This must be indicated in the single application;
- not use any crop protection or soil decontamination agents during the main crop, nor during preceding or follow-on crops, for a total period of at least 1 year;

- keep a crop information sheet on which the necessary data on the crop are recorded: e.g. sowing or planting date, preceding crop, follow-on crop, expected harvest date, mechanical weed control techniques applied (date and tool).

All parcels in the open air can be included in the application for this subsidy, except permanent pasture, grass clover, afforestation, protected crops and set-aside. Non-food set-aside is eligible for the subsidy.



Conservation of local cattle breeds and varieties of standard tree orchards which are in danger of extinction

Certain local farm animal breeds are in danger of extinction because it is more interesting from an economic point of view to breed more productive breeds. However, the preservation of genetic diversity of traditional animal breeds is a basis for the preservation of diversity in the countryside. A living gene bank is also important to breed in specific characteristics in existing breeds and varieties.

With this measure, the Flemish government supports breeds which are still economically acceptable in Flemish agriculture and prevents them from becoming extinct. The following breeds are eligible:

- Cattle breeds: *Rood Rundveeras van België* (Belgian Red), *Witrood Rundveeras van België* (Belgian White-and-Red), *Witblauw Dubbeldoel Rundveeras van België* (Belgian Blue-White).
- Sheep breeds: *Houtlandschaap*, *Kempens Schaap*, *Mergellandschaap*, *Belgisch Melkschaap*, *Vlaams Kuddeschaap*, *Ardense Voskop*, *Lakens Schaap*, *Vlaams Schaap*, *Entre-Sambre-et-Meuse Schaap*.

The amount of support granted per animal is 100 euros for the cattle breeds and 25 euros for the sheep breeds.

As a result of the intensification and specialisation in fruit growing there is often no room for standard tree fruit anymore in professional businesses.

However, standard tree orchards have important qualities where landscape is concerned, which should be preserved on top of their nature value. These local varieties of standard fruit trees are also an important living gene bank which can be used to develop new fruit varieties.

To encourage new plantings a subsidy of 4 euros per tree and per year is given for 5 years. In this case, the maintenance of the plantings for 5 years is obligatory. For the maintenance of existing standard tree orchards (older than 5 years) a maintenance agreement is entered into and a subsidy of 2 euros per tree and per year is given.

In order to qualify for the subsidy one is required to plant and/or maintain a minimum of 10 trees.



Introduction of crops with papilionaceous flowers into the silage

This agri-environmental commitment aims for the diversification of roughage production in Flemish cattle farming. It is perfectly possible to meet part of the protein requirement in the business using crops such as clover, grass clover or lucerne. This way, more business-oriented feedingstuffs are obtained, which reduces dependence on external sources of protein.

Farmers can receive a subsidy of up to 275 euros/ha if they meet the following conditions:

- make a commitment to grow at least half a hectare of grass clover, red clover or lucerne for 5 consecutive years and use the mowings in their animal feedingstuffs;
- the parcels may be interchanged annually. This is indicated via the single application;
- at least 10% per year of the business's total acreage for feedstuffs, excluding temporary and permanent pasture, must consist of crops with papilionaceous flowers;

- only farmers with ruminants are eligible for this subsidy;
- the crop must be kept at least until 15 February of the following year and it can only be mowed, not grazed.



Reduction in the use of fertilisers and pesticides in ornamental horticulture

The ornamental horticulture sector is characterised by a high intensity and extensive use of crop protection agents and fertilisers.

With this agri-environmental commitment the Flemish government wants to encourage Flemish ornamental horticulture businesses to optimise the use of crop protection agents and fertilisers within the business. Via the elaboration of a concrete plan at business level a commitment is made to actually meet the proposed reduction objectives.

When is an ornamental horticulture business eligible for the subsidy?

If it complies with the following conditions:

- make a commitment to optimise the use of crop protection agents and fertilisers during 5 consecutive years for its surface area for ornamental horticulture (min. 10 are), taking into account the environmental impact of its use of crop protection agents and fertilisers.
- the parcels may be interchanged annually. This is indicated via the single application.
- register with VMS (Flemish Environmental Plan for Ornamental Horticulture) per four-week period, mentioning for crop protection agents at least the agent, the formula and the amount, and for fertilisers the formula and the amount;

- submit a plan during the quarter following the first year of registration;
- have carried out the plan before the end of the five-year period;
- from the third year of registration onwards obtain a score of at least 70% at least once a year for the use of fertilisers and crop protection agents (category A).

The subsidy amounts to a maximum of 900 euros/ha for intensive ornamental horticulture under glass or plastic, a maximum of 450 euros/ha for intensive ornamental horticulture in the open air and a maximum of 75 euros/ha for tree nursery crops.



Application of the organic production method

The exemplary and leverage function of organic farming is essential in the evolution towards sustainable agriculture in Flanders. Organic farming has important trump cards when it comes to soil fertility, biodiversity, the prevention of contamination by pesticides, overfertilisation and air pollution, as well as animal health.

However, the organic production method does require considerable efforts from farmers.

Moreover, society does not sufficiently recognise these efforts and the corresponding loss of income, and it is not prepared either to pay for all of the extra direct costs of organic products.

This agri-environmental commitment offers financial support to farmers and horticulturists who wish to convert to organic farming. The extra costs involved need to be compensated. During the first 2 or 3 years it is important to compensate the extra costs of the conversion, because the products cannot yet be sold as organically grown products.

But afterwards as well, support remains important in order to turn the stagnation of the past few years into growth in the sector.

Farmers can receive the subsidy if they make a commitment to apply the organic production method for 5 consecutive years in accordance with all the applicable legal provisions. The parcels are indicated via the single application.

The subsidy depends on the crop and is degressive during the first five years after the conversion.

Parcel boundary management agreement

Parcel boundary management creates a buffer between agricultural land and vulnerable adjacent elements. Vulnerable elements can be, for instance, forests, watercourses, shelterbelts or roadsides. The parcel boundary then forms a protective belt which stops pesticide drift. The environmental quality in general is also improved because the parcel boundary has a reducing effect on the drainage of fertilisers and sediment (erosion).

This management agreement can be requested both for pasture and for arable land, and contains two packages: Parcel Boundary Management - Environment and Parcel Boundary Management - Nature. The main difference between both packages is that Parcel Boundary Management - Nature does not allow mowing before 15 June. This has to enhance the nature value of the boundary. With both packages the mowings have to be removed from the protection strip within 15 days.

Parcel boundaries consist of a sowed grass mixture or a spontaneous evolution of the vegetation.

The strips are between 6 and 12 metres wide and must not be treated with crop protection agents or fertilisers.

For the package Parcel Boundary Management - Environment a compensation of 0,0845 euros/m² is provided, and for the package Parcel Boundary Management - Nature 0,1581 euros/m².



Species protection management agreement

Everywhere in Europe there is a sharp decline in traditional bird species in agricultural areas.

The intensification of agriculture has something to do with this. More efficient harvesting, for instance, results in less harvest leftovers remaining on the fields, thus reducing the food available for farmland birds, such as skylarks or partridges.

The use of herbicides and insecticides contributes directly and indirectly to the disappearance of insects, which is another factor which influences food availability for the birds.

Meadow birds, such as the black-tailed godwit and the redshank, experience increasing difficulty to hatch their eggs successfully and to produce fledglings. Among other things, this has to do with the lack of food, but also with the loss of their breeding ground, e.g. due to the conversion of pasture into arable land.



Another animal species on our farmland which has declined sharply in recent decades is the hamster. In the period 1998-2002 there were only four relatively isolated areas in Flanders where hamsters could be found. The measures which need to be taken to get this rodent back on our farmland are, on the one hand, to provide enough food and, on the other, to make sure that the hamsters have enough shelter and that their burrows are not destroyed by the work on the land.

For farmland birds, meadow birds and hamsters packages are used which are different for arable land and pasture. The amounts of support depend on each package.



Erosion control management agreement

In certain regions in Flanders erosion is a major problem. On the farmland itself, erosion causes a lot of problems, such as loss of profits as a result of drainage or burial of seedlings and a decreasing fertility of the soil in the long term. But beside the field as well, erosion gives rise to problems such as mud streams on roads and in residential areas or pollution and silting up of watercourses and sewers.

The following packages from the management agreement refer to the consequences of erosion:

- Grass buffer strips (0,13 euros/m²);
- Grass corridors (0,16 euros/ha unless it borders on a parcel boundary 0,13 euros/ha);

- Dams with an erosion pit (amount of support depends on the size of the pit).

Obviously, erosion can also be tackled at the source via the following packages:

- Non-inverting tillage (80 euros/ha);
- Direct sowing (200 euros/ha).

For highly erosion-sensitive areas there is already a legal obligation to apply one erosion control measure. This remains valid, but some of the aforementioned packages go even further, offering advantages to both the environment and the farmer. In this case, the amount of support will be adjusted.



Water management agreement

The nitrate problem in Flanders is well-known, as are its consequences for the quality of ground and surface water. This measure wants to provide support for farmers who go further than the legal fertilisation requirements and in this way want to contribute to realising the environmental objective concerning nitrate.

The measure focuses on parcels located in vulnerable water areas. On these parcels, a commitment is made to:

- reduce the fertilisation standard which applies for the total N in these areas by at least 30%;
- keep a fertilisation and/or grazing register.

Besides these conditions, the amount of support also depends on the annual nitrate residue assessment which is to take place on each parcel (per 2 ha). Only if the measurement shows that the limit value of 86 kg NO₃-N/ha is not exceeded will the support be paid out.

The amount of support depends on the crop. For arable crops an amount of 450 euros/ha can be obtained, for pasture this is 685 euros/ha.



Management agreement for the restoration, development and maintenance of small landscape elements

Decades ago, small landscape elements (SLE's) such as hedges and shelterbelts were part of our cultural landscapes. But over the years, this aspect of the Flemish countryside has disappeared. And with the disappearance of these small landscape elements their ecological function has also disappeared. Often it concerns habitats or connecting roads for natural organisms.

Through the planting and maintenance of hedgerows, shelterbelts and pits, this measure wants to revalue the role of SLE's in the Flemish agricultural landscape. The grants are calculated per package and obviously depend on the size of the small landscape element one wishes to plant or maintain.



Planning measures by farmers in the framework of the Water Framework Directive

Problems such as desiccation on the one hand and flooding on the other are receiving more and more attention worldwide, but also within Flanders. The changing climate will probably intensify these phenomena in the future.

The aim of this measure is to tackle the problems of desiccation and flooding via water conservation. This implies that water from the region itself is temporarily stored in upstream areas. This results in a rising groundwater level and a reduction in the soil moisture deficit during periods of drought and an enhanced increase of shallow and deep groundwater.

Water conservation is very case-specific and is related to a number of parcel-specific characteristics such as soil type and crop. In addition, it is necessary to take into account the area in question when setting up this type of projects, because desiccation and flooding do not stop at parcel boundaries. Therefore, this measure can only be applied within management areas which are marked off according to the criteria of the Water Framework Directive. This does not include flood plains.

How can a farmer respond to these problems in practice?

A few examples:

- adaptation of ditch profiles;
- placing of small adjustable dams;
- building of earth embankments on parcel boundaries;
- placing of groundwater monitoring gauges.



Afforestation of agricultural land

The current forested area in Flanders is limited. Therefore, a constant balance is required between the different functions of a forest, such as recreation, ecology and economy. An expansion of the forested area constitutes an important contribution to many aspects, e.g. the Flemish environmental objectives, because the nature value of the Flemish countryside is increased and a contribution is made to the fight against climate change as well. On the other hand, the farmer is offered an alternative to his normal agricultural activities.

Afforestation subsidies are granted to private persons (both farmers and non-farmers) and public bodies which own or hold on lease agricultural land. The total area to be afforested must be at least 0.5 ha and the new forest must be maintained for at least 25 years, except for poplar, in which case it is 15 years.

The awarded subsidy can be divided into three parts:

■ Planting subsidy

The basic subsidy varies from 850 to 3.700 euros/ha, depending on the tree species. In addition, an extra subsidy is granted for planting underwood (500 euros/ha), planting thicket or building a firebreak (100 euros/100 metres) and the use of recommended origins (250 euros/ha).

■ Maintenance subsidy

The first five years after planting an annual maintenance subsidy may be granted. For native deciduous species this is 1.750 euros/ha for a period of 5 years, for poplar 1.100 euros/ha and for coniferous trees 875 euros/ha.

■ Income compensation

This subsidy varies depending on the status of the applicant and the afforestation concept. The duration of the subsidy also varies.

Applicant	Afforestation concept	Subsidy amount (euros/ha/year)	Duration (years)
Farmer	economic	375	5
Farmer	ecological	665	15
Other private person	economic	150	5
Other private person	ecological	150	15

Non-productive investment in forests

The Flemish forest policy is aimed at the many functions forests have to fulfil. With this measure the Flemish government wants to encourage forest owners to enhance the multifunctional use of forests even more, including the ecological and the recreational aspect. That is why it provides for two subsidies, namely a subsidy for the promotion of the ecological function of forests and a subsidy for reforestation.

■ Subsidy for the promotion of the ecological function of forests

In order to be entitled to this subsidy the first condition is to draw up a management plan for the resource which qualifies for the subsidy in conformity with the criteria for sustainable forest management. The resources must at least comply with one of the following conditions in order to be eligible for the subsidy: nature management of forest-free area, management of resources based on a certain forest nature use type, resources dominated by native tree species or recognised seed stocks.

Subsidy amounts vary between 50 and 125 euros/ha.

■ Subsidy for reforestation

Via the conversion of existing forest resources to native, mixed resources the ecological function of the forest is promoted. Subsidy amounts vary between 1.500 and 3.200 euros/ha, depending on the tree species to be planted in the resource.

For the use of recommended origins an extra amount of 250 euros/ha is provided.

For mixing at stock or group level there is also an extra 500 euros/ha.

AXIS 3

Quality of life in rural areas and diversification of the rural economy

Objectives:

Diversification of agricultural activities to non-agricultural activities increases the liveability of agriculture and contributes to an attractive, high-quality, multifunctional countryside.

The conservation and revaluation of the rural heritage contributes to the renewed appreciation of this heritage, and it generates employment in the countryside.

Attention to high-quality establishment locations, entrepreneurship in the countryside and a spatial-economic perspective, in accordance with the principles and objectives of the Spatial Structure Plan for Flanders, contributes to the creation of a favourable economic climate in the countryside.

The setting up of basic facilities for the economy and the countryside population, including cultural and leisure activities, for the benefit of a village or a number of villages, and for the corresponding small-scale infrastructure (incl. village renewal) result in a liveable, high-quality countryside.

Training and information.

The use of instruments and actions defined in the Flemish Parliament Act on Nature Conservation to make a contribution to the conservation objectives of the special protection areas.



Investment with respect to diversification of agricultural activities

An increasing number of farmers and horticulturists are developing activities within their business which are aimed at diversification.

This way, added value is created for the business without the need for expansion or intensification of the primary production of agricultural and horticultural products.

For investments aimed at the performance of non-agricultural activities within the business the financial support is given in the form of interest rate subsidies and capital incentives.

The support amounts to 30%.

What is considered diversification by the Flemish Agricultural Investment Fund?

This is, among other things:

- the commercialisation of farm products
- farm tourism and opening the business to the public
- the production and use of renewable fuels
- carrying out landscape management
- operating a care farm

The general conditions in order to be eligible for support for these investments are:

- the operators of the business must be sufficiently qualified
- the business must be viable
- the business must comply with the minimum standards regarding the environment, hygiene and animal welfare, and the production must be organised in such a way that a positive result is obtained with respect to these minimum standards
- there must be a certain guarantee for the sale of the produce
- the new activities must remain subordinate to the normal agricultural activities when it comes to the time invested in them and the income they generate

Area-based approach

The fragmentation of the Flemish countryside requires an area-based policy framework. In order to respond to local opportunities and needs it is important to adapt to the area in question. That is why a partnership has been set up between the Flemish Minister for Rural Policy, the provincial governments, the Countryside Division of the Flemish Land Company, the local authorities and other rural actors in order to carry out an area-based rural policy. This partnership is also structurally embedded via provincial management committees (PMCs). Per province there is one PMC.

In order to carry out this area-based policy, a two-track policy is used: via calls for tender for the rural area and via the Leader method. Both tracks are given equal attention.



■ Area-based policy via calls for tender for the rural area

Here, the PMCs will launch calls for tender and assign projects. The calls for tender will be carried out in the rural area but outside the Leader areas to be marked off (unless they are at the service of the province's entire rural area). The daily follow-up of the projects is done by the existing provincial rural offices. Project promoters can count on up to 65% of the total project cost in public aid.

■ Area-oriented policy via the Leader method

The aim of Leader is to help countryside actors to develop the potential of their local area in the longer term. This is done via Local Action Groups (LAGs). These LAGs have to draw up and carry out their local development strategy. This implies that they are responsible, among other things, for the selection of projects, guidance for promoters, the financial and content follow-up of the implementation of the local development strategy and information and publicity.

Promotion of tourist activities

The Flemish countryside has a huge potential for tourism and recreation. It is both the city dweller's recreational zone and the country dweller's living area. But certain areas need new impulses for tourism and recreation, and for those areas it is important to create a sense of identity. This will also stimulate the local economy and the value of the area in general.

In the project calls which will be launched the following topics are sure to appear:

- optimisation of the quality of the recreational infrastructure;
- development of reception centres;
- regional educational guidance for visitors and educational infrastructure;
- development and/or marketing of tourist services related to countryside tourism.

Who can submit projects?

Local governments or tourist and recreational associations which depend on local and provincial

governments, public bodies and especially public bodies in charge of the execution of land use, land consolidation and nature plans, and civil society organisations.

Within this measure attention will also be given to land use, nature planning and land consolidation. In large projects they can be a means to increase the quality of the recreational infrastructure.



Basic facilities for the economy and the rural population

In the rural as well, there are groups such as young people, elderly people, disabled people and underprivileged people, who need adapted facilities. Contrary to cities, which have specific facilities for each of these groups, it turns out that in the rural this is not always the case. Within the specific rural context specific actions need to be set up in order to provide basic facilities for these vulnerable groups.

Per target group projects can be submitted, based on e.g. the following topics:

- youth: investing in facilities for play and child care;
- seniors: setting up facilities for the elderly, integration of care facilities, setting up pilot projects according to residential care regions, setting up volunteer organisations for the elderly;
- underprivileged people: setting up social employment initiatives for countryside tasks, elaborating specific instruments to locate, reach and guide the poor in the countryside; paying extra attention to the specific target group of farmers with difficulties; rural poverty;
- disabled people: setting up actions related to accessibility.

At a regional level as well, basic services can be set up:

- living: setting up services in accordance with the living situation in the countryside, with respect to housing quality, housing availability, unoccupied houses, social housing and – specifically for the elderly – the integration of care facilities;
- service centres and integration of basic facilities

Who can submit projects?

Local governments, public bodies, civil society organisations, and specifically also organisations from the socio-economic sector (employment, social services).

Village renewal and development

Centre enhancement in small rural villages is crucial in order to increase the liveability of those villages. By improving the centre, the village will become a more attractive living environment and the local economy might get a boost. But the townspeople must also be 'brought back together' so that the 'village identity' is revalued. Projects aimed at the reinforcement of the heritage, the encounter aspect and social relationships within the village are therefore essential to reach this goal.

What can you do concretely as a project promoter?

- renovation and conditioning of existing heritage into community centres for village people;
- rebuilding of public areas as meeting places for village people (young and old) and users such as tourists, recreational visitors and passers-by (village meeting places), including actions against unliveable traffic thoroughfares;
- the elaboration of a village development strategy, paying attention to citizen participation, regional identity and quality processes;
- ...

Who can submit projects?

Local governments and public bodies.
For community centres also local associations.



Conservation and revaluation of the rural heritage

The characteristic quality of the countryside is increasingly being lost. Buildings shaping its identity and image and other witnesses from the past disappear or deteriorate. Historical landscapes fade and fragment and do not evolve into new quality entities. Obviously it is important to protect this rural heritage. But by developing the heritage as a witness and a part of the identity of a certain region even more added value can be obtained. This way, this rural heritage can be integrated into a perception strategy, and tourist and recreational activities can be linked to it.

Actions aimed at the conservation or revaluation of the cultural-historical heritage include:

- encouragement of the restoration of non-protected small-scale cultural-historical heritage and cultural-historical infrastructure with an identity-shaping character;
- conservation, protection and change of use of rural architectural heritage;
- the building of new art and culture elements;
- actions related to rural movable and immovable heritage via a network of museums and heritage depots;
- actions related to the change of use/re-use of rural heritage (protected sheds, buildings) in a modern agricultural business operation.

Natural heritage can be conserved or revalued e.g. via the following actions:

- reinforcement and repair of quality landscape and natural elements;
- actions for the benefit of basic values such as quiet, dark;
- investments within the special protection areas (Natura 2000 areas) in the framework of maintenance, restoration and revaluation of the natural heritage with a view to the good state of preservation of habitats and of habitats of species for which the special protection area was designated.

Who can submit projects?

Local governments, public bodies and non-profit organisations.

Intermediary services (education and training of rural entrepreneurs)

Intermediary services are services which coordinate the demand for and supply of capital, labour or products. Intermediary services create a positive climate for entrepreneurship via focussed and innovative service provision such as e.g. education and training, guidance or networking. This is thus not direct but indirect support for entrepreneurs.

By making rural entrepreneurship attractive again the local economy can be a driving force behind the general development of a region. The countryside has several trump cards which offer opportunities for additional employment. This is precisely what this measure aims to do: boost the Flemish countryside as a working area for its inhabitants.

Not only the traditional forms of education (courses) but also the broad range of related training activities, such as communication, professionalisation, guidance and networking are given attention.

This includes e.g.:

- organising proper support for regional products;
- training, stimulation, professionalisation, networking and guidance for different forms of corporate social responsibility;
- initiatives with respect to green care;
- promotion and communication regarding the countryside as a 'quality label'.

Who can submit projects?

Local governments, public bodies, civil society organisations and associations.



AXIS 4

LEADER

Objective

The elaboration and implementation of local development strategies contributes to a reinforcement of the territorial identity and stimulates the rural economy.



Within this Axis the Leader approach is central.

Selection of Leader areas

The aim of Leader is to encourage and help countryside actors to think about the potential of their area from a longer term perspective. In order to qualify for selection, the Local Action Groups (LAGs) have to present a development strategy for their area. The area as well as the Local Action Group and the development strategy are subject to certain selection criteria.

The objectives included in the local development strategies must fit in with the general objective of 'improving the quality of life in the countryside and the diversification of the rural economy'.

Also, actions have to fit in with the framework of the provincial rural policy plans. In Flanders a maximum of 10 LAGs can be selected.

Implementation of development strategies

The members of the LAGs jointly elaborate a local development strategy for the area and are responsible for its implementation. The LAGs determine the procedure for the submission and approval of the projects which contribute to reaching the objectives from the development strategy. The LAGs also evaluate and approve the projects.

Typical of these initiatives are their local nature and the fact that they take advantage of the potential of the area. It concerns mostly small-scale initiatives which are innovative and broader than the existing initiatives. These characteristics can be a lever for the improvement of the image and the awareness of the region, the boosting of employment, the encouragement of tourism and the corresponding economic impact, the improvement of the quality of life, etc.

Project promoters can count on up to 65% of the total project cost in public support.

A maximum of 20% of the budget of the LAG can be used for the operation of the LG. 100% of the operational costs are subsidised.

Cooperation projects with other rural areas

The Local Action Groups can also set up cooperation projects with other rural areas. This way, solutions can be sought to certain problems the areas are facing, or the available potential can be valorised. By creating a scale advantage the realisation of certain projects can be optimised.

A cooperation project can be set up based either on similarities (geography, specific production, cultural trumps, historical context,...) or on complementary factors (geographical advantages, complementary knowledge and know-how,...). The cooperation can involve both interterritorial (within Belgium) and transnational projects (between regions of different European Member States).

In the framework of the implementation of this measure the Flemish Land Company will organise one or more calls for tender for the submission of proposals.

The cooperation projects will be approved based on the following criteria:

- the cooperation must consist of the sharing of know-how and/or human and financial resources available in each of the areas in question;
- the cooperation must fit in with the orientation the Local Action Groups have clearly indicated in their development strategy and work towards one or more objectives from the development strategy;
- the cooperation must consist of carrying out a common action with concrete results. Exchanging experience is possible as well, on the condition that this leads to tangible results;
- it must be clear that the cooperation results in added value for all partners involved (scale advantage, exchange of experience, know-how,...).

Per cooperation project a subsidy of up to 95 % of the project costs can be obtained.

Technical assistance

General technical assistance

Within general technical assistance actions related to preparation, management, supervision, evaluation and information of the management authority are financed.

This includes e.g. the cost of the obligatory evaluations carried out by an external evaluator and the costs related to the implementation of the communication plan.

Flemish Rural Network

Networking is an important item within rural policy. In order to put this into practice as well for the RDP, a Rural Network has been set up within the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Information gathering, information analysis and information dissemination are the core tasks of this Rural Network.

The Flemish Rural Network brings organisations and public services which are active in the area of rural development together, with the objective of developing activities related to:

- tracing and analysis of transferable good practices and the provision of information on these practices;
- management of the network;
- organisation of exchange of experience and know-how;
- preparation of training programmes for local groups which are being set up;
- providing technical assistance for interterritorial and transnational cooperation;
- cooperating with the European Rural Network.

For further information on the Flemish Rural Network, please contact:

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Who's who

The **Flemish Minister of Agriculture** is responsible for the elaboration of this programme.

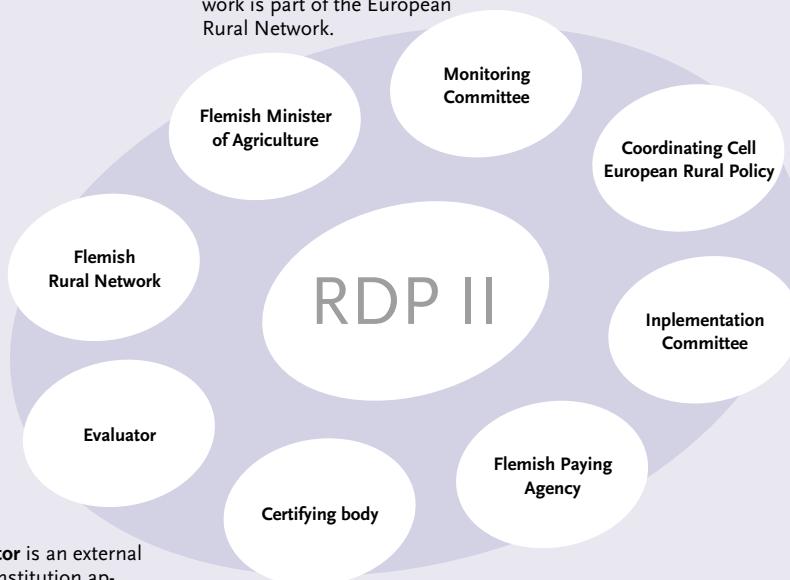
The diagram below shows the different actors involved in this elaboration.

The **Flemish Rural Network** brings organisations and public services which are active in the area of rural development together. Its core tasks are gathering, analysing and disseminating information. At European level, the Flemish Rural Network is part of the European Rural Network.

The **Monitoring Committee** is composed of all members of the Flemish Government and delegates of the socio-economic partners.

This committee supervises the execution and the progress of the programme.

The **Coordinating Cell European Rural Policy** has been appointed as Managing Authority and is part of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. It is responsible for the general management and the general communication with respect to the programme. In addition, it also functions as secretariat of the Implementation Committee and the Monitoring Committee, and it is in charge of the contacts with the European Commission.



The **evaluator** is an external person or institution appointed by the region which carries out an evaluation of the programme and its functioning at regular intervals. The European Commission obliges the Member States to make an ex-ante, a mid-term (2010) and an ex-post (2015) evaluation. The ex-ante evaluation is part of the submitted programme.

The **certifying body** is an external public or private person appointed by the region. This body certifies the management, supervision and control systems and the annual accounts of the Paying Agency.

The **Flemish Paying Agency** is responsible for the actual payment of the subsidies to the final beneficiary, and falls under the Agency for Agriculture and Fisheries.

In the **Implementation Committee** all services managing measures from the programme (management services) are brought together, together with other actors, such as the paying agency, the division responsible for monitoring the output of the programme and the Rural Network. Via monthly meetings the management and implementation of the programme are followed up.

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Vlaamse overheid



“European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development: Europe investing in rural areas.”

