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The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development

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'In the know' Did you know...

...that over €230 billion will be invested in European Union (EU) rural development projects and initiatives during the period from 2007 to 2013 and that these funds will be delivered by a total of 94 different Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) that are now operating in rural Europe.

Some €90.8 billion of the RDP finances has been earmarked in the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and another €70.1 billion will come from national authorities for rural areas. Project beneficiaries are forecast to provide a further €64.8 billion of their own private money in the overall EU rural development budget. An additional amount of €4.6 billion is being made available to rural development as a result of various first pillar reforms and the Health Check. The European Economic Recovery Plan has added another 1.02 billion, thus increasing the overall EAFRD contribution to €96.4 billion for the period 2007-2013.

These financial commitments combine to represent a significant sum of funds and they reflect the crucial role that EU rural development policy plays in supporting the long-term prosperity of rural areas in the 27 Member States.

Our EU rural development policy is based on a carefully prepared strategic approach that links local actions in rural communities to important priority goals at national and EU levels. A considerable amount of planning has gone into designing the 94 RDPs to ensure that they provide an integrated range of support measures for rural stakeholders concerning employment and growth, environmental sustainability and social inclusion.

The EAFRD is a key tool for implementing our rural development policy and its practical benefits are already starting to materialise. EAFRD funds activities that are: improving the competitiveness of farm and forest systems, supporting agricultural and forest management practices to help preserve and enrich the environment and rural landscape, strengthening quality of life, and enhancing economic diversification opportunities for rural residents. Member States are also busy expanding Leader-type approaches within their mainstream economic, social and environmental policies for rural development.

Such benefits will continue to grow as more and more new projects receive support from the EAFRD across rural Europe. All of these projects will play increasingly important roles in

tackling the main challenges that have been identified during the European Commission's recent Health Check of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Challenges like mitigating climate change impacts, conserving biodiversity, improving water management and harnessing renewable energy all need to be taken seriously now; otherwise we will be forced to take them even more seriously in the not-so-distant future.

Fortunately, Member States have established a robust set of RDPs capable of addressing many different rural development challenges, and so support the sustainability and economic growth of Europe's rural areas.

Communicating rural developments

I remain committed to making sure we communicate our collective achievements in these areas because rural stakeholders have a right to know what is happening with the €230 billion and what the RDPs are delivering. They also have the right to know what is possible from the EAFRD and so I am very aware of the importance of communicating the lessons that are being learnt under the different RDPs.

Communication forms a core part of our rural development policy and the Commission's strategic thinking in this area resulted in the introduction of a European Network for Rural Development (EN RD). The network was launched in October 2008 with a proactive remit to generate good ideas and exchange experience between rural stakeholders.

An ambitious EN RD work programme has been agreed which blends policy-level guidance for rural development actors on EU-wide issues with focused support at national, regional and local levels for each Member State. Special attention is also being paid to measuring and evaluating the success of rural development activities, since we need to know what is working well and what might need to be changed in order to make certain that we maximise value for money from the €230 billion.

This new rural development publication, the EU Rural Review, plays an important part in communicating the constructive benefits that EAFRD actions are now generating. The magazine provides a unique opportunity to showcase good ideas and transfer rural development experience from all over the EU, and beyond.

Featuring an interesting collection of helpful articles and relevant analysis, the magazine aims to provide something for everyone involved in the development of rural areas. Contemporary policy issues are unravelled and explained by leading experts in their fields and in-depth coverage of progress of the RDP actions is also presented in a series of illustrated reviews.

Other regular elements include conclusions from recent rural research projects and the examination of international issues that affect rural Europe. I was particularly pleased to see the interviews with 'rural citizens' since I know how much I have

learnt from listening to other people's real-life experiences of supporting rural growth and sustaining a living countryside.

I therefore warmly welcome this first issue of the EU Rural Review and am sure that readers will find it as useful as I have in providing a valuable source of knowledge-building information. The first issue provides a timely occasion to raise awareness about the many opportunities that are available from the EAFRD and its publication also coincides with some important outcomes from the CAP Health Check.

I am now already looking forward to the next issue of the magazine, which I predict will feature another host of topical and high-profile issues to help keep Europe's rural development readers up to date and in the know.



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Mariann Fischer Boel

Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development

The European Network for Rural Development: a new era in EU rural development policy

A new framework for support services for rural areas has been introduced by the European Commission. This innovative network covers all aspects of rural life in the 27 Member States and is already beginning to prove its value by helping to enhance the effectiveness of EU rural development policy.

The European Network for Rural Development (EN RD) became operational in October 2008. Its launch marked the start of a new era in EU rural development policy. The EN RD builds on a long history of successful experiences and facilitates an integrated set of economic, social and environmental benefits for all rural areas within the EU.

The EN RD's new coordinated approach to rural development activity reflects EU policy directions agreed in the Community Strategic Guidelines for Rural Development (2006/144/EC). EN RD operations are outlined further in Article 67 of Council Regulation (EC) N° 1698/2005 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). These establish the network's role as a platform for exchange of best practice and expertise between stakeholders on policy design, management and implementation of rural development actions.

Many of the EN RD's activities have their origins in methodologies that were applied effectively during previous Leader programme periods, particularly in networking activities. These approaches proved themselves to be both productive and popular with rural areas throughout the EU and

the new EN RD will build upon these achievements.

The scope of the new EN RD is substantially larger than the previous Leader networking systems, and it supports the implementation of the entire EU rural development policy. Thus demands on the network are high, since the four rural development policy axes create a greater need than there was previously for sharing experience, information and links between rural stakeholders. Furthermore, the enlarged EU incorporates not only more rural areas than ever before but also more diversity. Achieving effective networking has therefore never been more important.

Remaining relevant

EN RD operations are overseen by a Coordination Committee. The Committee, chaired by the European Commission, is responsible for ensuring that EN RD activities remain relevant to the changing needs of rural stakeholders. Membership of the Committee includes representatives from National Rural Networks (NRNs), Member State authorities and other organisations in the EU rural development world. There is also a special subcommittee that deals with the Leader axis.

The EN RD Coordination Committee has strong links with the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development. This helps to strengthen connections between implementation and evaluation of EU rural development policy. The European Evaluation Network for Rural Development plays an important role in helping EAFRD evaluators and managers in their evaluation tasks.

EN RD value

Achieving added value is a priority for the network. As such, its day-to-day operations involve a broad spectrum of actions that are tailored to meet the individual requirements of different rural areas and rural stakeholders. Examples of added-value EN RD actions can be organising various expert working groups that examine common rural problems in order to identify common development solutions, and developing synergies with other European funds available in rural areas.

Such actions are being based on actual needs that are identified as important by organisations at EU and Member State levels. These include both those in public sector administrations and other stakeholders involved in rural areas and having an interest in rural development

activities or policy. The work concentrates on providing results that could not have been achieved by individual Member States acting alone and these outputs represent the real added value of the EN RD.

EN RD Contact Point

The aims of the network reflect the scale of challenges that it faces and the EN RD has been equipped with an experienced team of rural development specialists to support the delivery of its remit. These experts provide the network with a highly competent workforce which implements a range of key services and communications tools, together known as the EN RD Contact Point.

Established by an external contractor and supervised by the EN RD Coordination Committee, the Contact Point's mandate covers many different rural development services including supporting NRNs and publicising good practices.

Information provision sits at the heart of the Contact Point's remit and a variety of different communication tools are being harnessed to boost exchanges of experience and ideas throughout rural Europe. These include, in addition to this publication, a regular newsletter, workshops, seminars and conferences, web-based services and thematic working papers covering practical information and guidance and informing the policy debate on topics important to EAFRD stakeholders.

The Contact Point cooperates closely with the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development's Helpdesk. To date, the outcomes of the work of the Helpdesk have included a detailed assessment of the evaluation needs in the Member States. This constitutes a basis for planning the activities, as well as work on improving the evaluation methodology, of Rural Development Programmes (RDPS).

The Contact Point's cooperation with evaluation experts and other rural development specialists is complemented by its close support to NRNs. Dedicated personnel within the Contact Point ensure regular direct contact and consultation with the NRNs in order to match the EN RD's activities with the needs in Member States.

Early support for the NRNs has been prioritised and the first six formal meetings of these groups took place between November 2008 and September 2009. These events provide a chance for different countries to share their experiences so far, identify key capacity building areas for the Contact Point to work on and establish useful connections between representatives from all Member States.

Work programme

The NRN meetings form part of the Contact Point's work programme, which is renewed each year in July. Work programme activities are agreed in advance by the European Commission and the EN RD Coordination Committee, associating as well the Leader sub-committee. Many

varied tasks have been programmed for the Contact Point over the next months, including important support for the Thematic Working Groups (TWG).

The topics of the TWGs have been carefully chosen to ensure a common and multisectoral analysis. They are not limited to single axes of the EU rural development policy and have been deliberately designed to provide a more horizontal perspective. The scope of work is sufficiently wide to integrate inputs from the NRNs and from the LAGs' experiences.

Specially selected experts from across the EU-27 are undertaking analysis to inform the members of the TWGs and, through them, the EN RD Coordination Committee. Three major themes are being analysed initially:

- *Targeting territorial specificities and needs in rural development programmes* – how can rural development policy best address territorial needs and contribute to balanced development in the EU's rural areas
- *Agriculture and the wider rural economy* – this is identifying and analysing linkages and synergies between agriculture and the wider rural economy and aims to identify policy implementation strategies which fully take into account the potentiality of these linkages
- *Public goods and public intervention* – this is contributing, through relevant analysis and the diffusion of results, to ensuring that rural development interventions enhance the provision of public goods for the benefit of society.

EN RD Contact Point remit includes:

- coordination with National Rural Networks
- providing a database of good practices in EU rural development activities
- supporting thematic work on relevant policy topics
- carrying out analysis of different rural development monitoring indicators
- supporting transnational cooperation between Local Action Groups (LAGs)
- providing secretariat functions for all EN RD structures and thematic groups
- representing the EN RD at rural development events
- promoting the EN RD and EAFRD activities throughout the EU-27.

T. HUDSON



These themes will not remain static and different issues are expected to emerge from a variety of sources including national stakeholders and, later on, the mid-term evaluations of the RDPs. The findings of the TWGs will be reported via working papers, possibly publications and thematic seminars.

In addition to supporting EN RD thematic work, the Contact Point is involved in supporting various other information events for EU rural development stakeholders. The EN RD's first seminar took place in Brussels on 30–31 March 2009 and was titled 'Capacity building for National Rural Networks'. Participants at the event examined the challenges that NRNs face in being able to efficiently support the implementation of EU rural development policy. The seminar also provided a useful platform for discussion between organisations and managing authorities, and for networks of different EU, national and regional dimensions.

Another seminar is being planned for Spring 2010 by the EN RD to identify opportunities for semi-subsistence farming. This topic remains particularly valid for Mediterranean countries and new Member States and seminar delegates will examine the role that semi-subsistence agricultural systems play in the rural economy, as well as issues surrounding the public benefits that are often associated with this important sector.

EN RD online

Information concerning the seminars organised by the Contact Point, and all of its other operations are available online via the EN RD website. Hosted by the European Commission's Europa Internet portal, the EN RD website provides a powerful package of multi-purpose and multilingual rural development tools.

The website contains a collection of useful search facilities that have been designed for a wide range of rural development

interests. Interactive functions are being developed progressively and these will include the ability to search for: good and best practices within the different rural development policy axes (further to such practices being identified in systematic way at Member State level), project- and programme-level activities underway in different Member States, progress against key monitoring and implementation indicators provided by the Commission, transnational cooperation partners, and specialised sectoral information.

Future directions

The website and other EN RD services are being monitored regularly and results will be evaluated to ensure that the Contact Point's actions remain pertinent, targeted and effective. This ongoing evolution of strategic EN RD communication and capacity building tools will mirror the dynamic nature of EU rural development policy as it responds to challenges and opportunities that arise over the coming years.

A firm foundation is now in place to facilitate easier exchanges between different rural actors and most aspects of the EN RD are fully functional. New support services will be rolled out by the Contact Point in future work programmes and this section of the *EU Rural Review* magazine will continue to report on these latest developments as they become active.



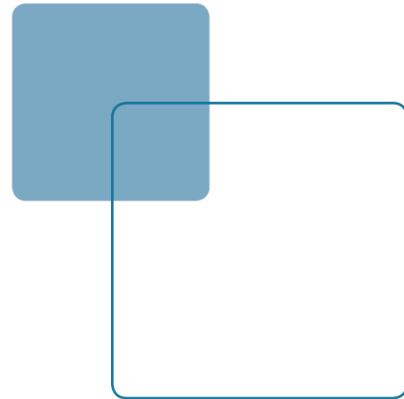
T. HUDSON



EN RD website tools include:

- calendar of information about Contact Point news and events
- a 'Who's Who' directory of EU rural development stakeholders
- regularly updated answers to frequently asked questions
- searchable good practice databases
- transnational cooperation facilities and guidance functions
- Member State information
- EN RD publications
- LAG database
- access to a selection of e-thematic network documents
- database of EAFRD administrative documents
- official EC documents
- archived Leader material
- electronic e-mail contacts.

<http://enrd.ec.europa.eu>



Integrated rural development: introducing the four rural development policy axes

The EU's rural development policy for the period 2007 to 2013 has been built around a strategic framework that integrates four core priority objectives known as 'axes'. Each axis has its own set of sub-priorities – 'measures' – and these provide support for specific types of rural development action in the Member States.

EU rural development policy has been significantly strengthened over the past few years through a coordinated process that continues to align policy elements towards the main characteristics of Europe's rural areas. The current process is founded on Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005, which provides the official basis of EU support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD).

The adoption of this Regulation set the wheels in motion for a new approach to the programming of EU rural development policy. A phased approach was applied and the initial planning phase involved the preparation, at EU level, of Community Strategic Guidelines. These Guidelines established a set of overall priorities for EU rural development policy and incorporated content from the Göteborg and Lisbon Councils, covering key issues such as environmental sustainability and economic growth.

Completion of the Community Strategic Guidelines provided Member States with a macro policy context to help them develop National Strategy Plans. This second policy planning phase involved national authorities analysing their rural situations and identifying corresponding rural development priorities that supported goals from the Community Strategic Guidelines.

The National Strategy Plans were then used as a reference framework for Member States to prepare detailed Rural Development Programmes (RDPs). These represent the main operational mechanism for EU rural development policy across the EU-27 and are designed to target specific national or regional priorities.

Monitoring and evaluation systems have been established as an integral part of the strategic policy programming approach and their aim is to track the performance of the RDPs. These tracking systems are based on the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (CMEF), which includes defined input, output, result and impact indicators. The CMEF's coherent structure has been introduced to help all

RDPs operate consistent monitoring and evaluation procedures.

Such a phased and strategic approach to rural development policy programming ensures consistency from high-level EU development goals to local-level rural actions and vice versa. The former have now been updated with the 'new challenges' from the Health Check of the Common Agricultural Policy.

Challenges and opportunities

The new challenges for EU rural development policy focus on issues related to tackling climate change, conserving biodiversity, managing water quality, optimising renewable energy sources and restructuring the dairy sector. Additional strategic emphasis has also recently been placed on securing broadband Internet access for all rural areas throughout the EU.

Other core challenges for rural development policy include: protecting jobs which are in decline, particularly in the agricultural sector; reducing income gaps with urban areas; ensuring the diversification of activities; and maintaining local services in sparsely populated areas.

Furthermore, particular challenges are faced regarding modernisation in the new Member States from Eastern Europe. Here, rural development must be achieved in a very different agricultural context where small family holdings are the norm and there is less potential employment for farm workers outside the agricultural sector.

Thankfully, many opportunities do exist to address these challenges and the EAFRD is a highly flexible tool that can be used by rural development stakeholders in all 27 Member States.

EAFRD axes

The EAFRD provides the co-finance for the Member States' RDP operations, and a list of nearly 40 different rural development measures are eligible to receive co-financing. Using this common set of measures assists coordination across the RDPs. It also facilitates flexibility, since each RDP is designed to comprise development measures that suit specific national or regional situations.

RDP measures are organised around core priority objectives, known as axes. There are three thematic axes and one horizontal methodological axis. Titles of the three main thematic axes indicate the type of rural development actions that they support. These are:

- Axis 1 - Improving the competitiveness of agriculture and forestry
- Axis 2 - Supporting land management and improving the environment
- Axis 3 - Improving the quality of life and encouraging diversification of economic activities.

These three thematic axes are supplemented by the fourth methodological axis, which focuses on the 'Leader' approach and encourages partnership activity via Local Action Groups (LAGs) that implement integrated rural development strategies. The relationships between the axes and overall rural development policy are illustrated in Figure 1 overleaf.



Rural development roles

The EAFRD co-finances each axis of the EU rural development policy and all four axes have been designed to play a specific rural development role within the national and regional RDPs.

In order to ensure a balanced strategy, a minimum level of financing was fixed for each axis. For axis 1, no less than 10% of the total RDP financial plan was set. For axis 2, budgets needed to account for 25% or more of the total RDP financial plan, while axis 3 funds matched the axis 1 base allocations at 10%. Leader actions were all to receive a minimum of 5% from each RDP financial plan.

These requirements were presented in the European Commission's guidance to Member States and Figure 2 illustrates how these baseline figures have been translated into the actual total EU 27 allocation of EAFRD for each axis.

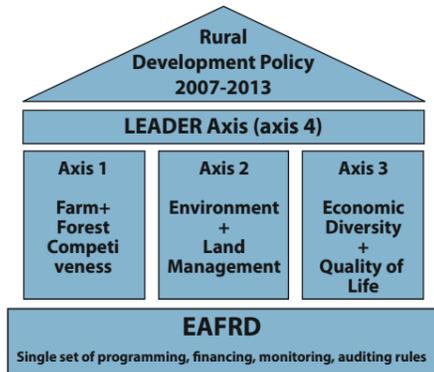
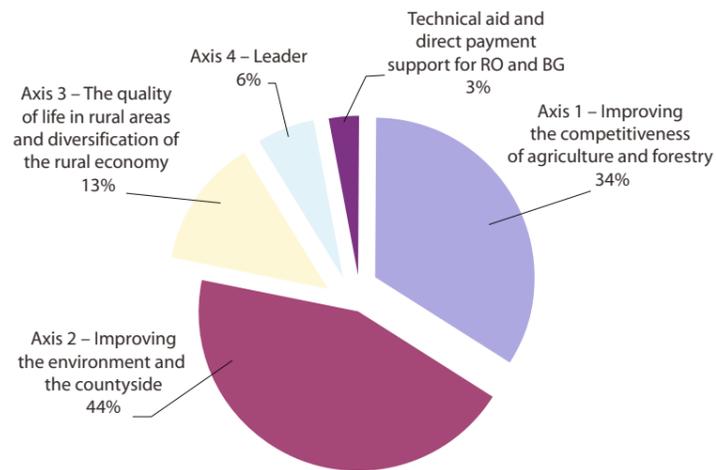


Figure 1: The four EU rural development policy axes

Further analyses of the budgets and rural development measures for each axis are presented in a set of special features that follow this article. As an introduction to these features, the table opposite provides a brief summary of the main priorities and points for each rural development policy axis. This table highlights headline objectives for individual axes and draws attention to typical types of activity that will be financed under the axes' measures. It also indicates key issues related to the axes' different roles in EU rural development policy.

Figure 2: Total EU allocations of EAFRD for each axis



	Axis 1	Axis 2	Axis 3	Axis 4
Priority goals	Strong and dynamic EU agriculture and forestry sectors Modernised, innovative production and sale chains for farm and forest commodities Key sectors targeted for investment in physical and human capital Active knowledge transfer processes	Promotion of environmentally sustainable land-use methods Mitigation of climate change sources and adaptation to impacts of climate change Preservation of natural resources such as water and soil and of the farmed landscape and forest High Nature Value farming systems conserved and expanded	New employment opportunities created Standards of living and quality of rural life strengthened Equal opportunities available for disadvantaged members of rural communities Access to appropriate rural services extended	Strong local rural development and governance capacity Active, confident and competent rural communities Popular and transparent LAG development actions Mobilising endogenous development potential of rural areas
Headline objectives	Improving competitiveness of EU agricultural and forestry sectors Facilitating restructuring, development and innovation	Improving the EU's environment and countryside Providing support for environmentally sensitive land management	Improving the quality of life in rural areas Encouraging the diversification of non-farm rural economic activities	Integrating the Leader approach into mainstream rural development programming Expanding LAG interventions
Eligible types of activity	Physical and capital investments Human resource skills training Enhancing quality of farm and forest production processes and products	Sustainable land-use methods on agricultural and forestry land Afforestation Non-productive investments Land management under natural handicaps	Diversification of rural economies Improving services for rural residents Skills training, capacity building and community mobilisation	Implementation of local development strategies Cooperation projects between LAGs LAG management and development
Related issues	Entrepreneurship, managerial abilities and 'innovation culture' represent crucial success factors Farm and forest products should be increasingly qualitative, healthy and 'green'	Climate change, renewable energy, water management, biodiversity and High Nature Value farming systems will all become progressively more prominent in EU rural development actions Innovation in these areas provides many opportunities	Non-farm economies will continue to grow in diversified rural economies Population trends and other social factors heavily influence the future viability of rural areas	Inclusive and collective development methods achieve strong legacies New approaches need time and nurturing Cooperation offers considerable added value for rural areas





Strengthening the competitiveness of EU farming and forestry

Agriculture and forestry remain essential elements in the European rural economy and axis 1 of the EU rural development policy offers many new opportunities to help these important rural sectors innovate, compete and modernise.

Farming and forestry continue to play important roles in structuring EU rural areas by means of both their direct and indirect impact on a production chain of goods, services or activities. Furthermore, most small and medium-sized firms, as well as micro-enterprises in the agri-food or forestry industries are located in rural areas and the demand for local services generated by these businesses clearly benefits the preservation and development of farm or forest activities. Both agriculture and forestry also have major impacts on rural land use and provide the main source of many environmental public goods.

The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) provides a major opportunity for all these features of European rural economies, and special provisions have been set out in axis 1 of the rural development policy to use EAFRD to support actions that assist the 'Competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sector'.

Policy thinking behind axis 1 recognises the key role that modernisation of this sector plays in driving forward the rural economy as a whole across the EU-27. Support for farm modernisation is often used with the view to rationalising the use of resources, e.g. replacing old irrigation

systems with more efficient equipment. Different needs apply in different Member States but common benefits can be achieved by wisely targeted investments in the multi-functional nature of EU farm and forest systems.

Axis 1 allocations

Member States reflect the importance placed on modernising farm and forest sector operations in their relatively high allocations of EAFRD to axis 1 measures. In total, some 35% of all EAFRD resources are being channelled through axis 1 (including Leader actions from axis 4 contributing to this objective). Figure 1 below shows the distribution of this axis 1 funding across the different Member States.

Figure 1 data highlights differences in the distribution of axis 1 allocations and these demonstrate the strengths of differing rural economies and the priorities for other rural development activities.

Development measures

A useful 'basket' of development measures are available under axis 1. These include several traditional structural agricultural policy tools such as: investments in agricultural and forestry holdings, the development of human capital through aid packages supporting early retirement, young farmers' start-up assistance, professional training and agricultural advisory services. In addition, more innovative measures are also available aimed at improving value in the agri-food chain, or supporting innovation and the dissemination of new technologies, entrepreneurship and the promotion of quality products.

Member State preferences for these different development measures are illustrated in Figure 2, which shows 'farm modernisation', 'adding value to agricultural and forestry products' and 'improving and developing infrastructure' as three significant axis 1 tools across the EU.

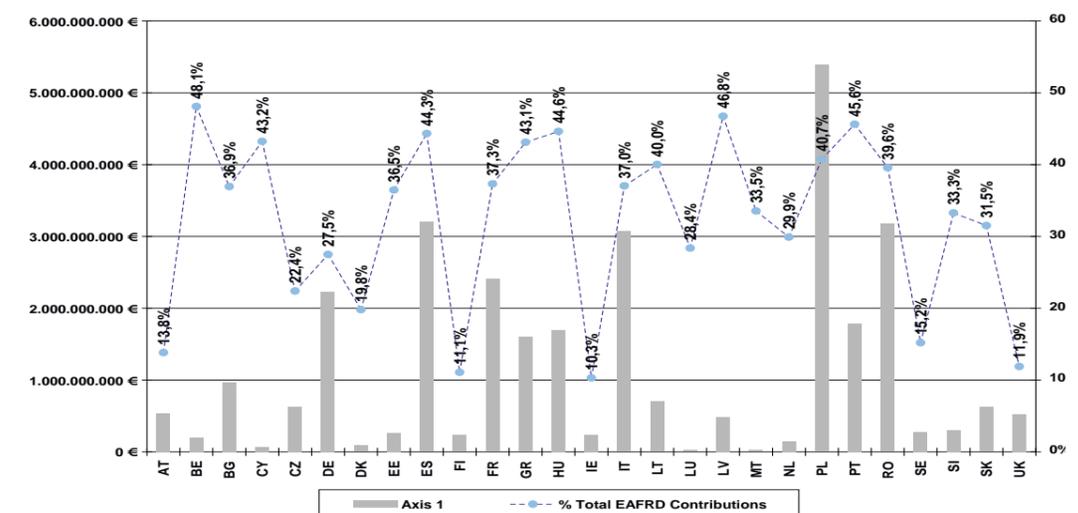


Figure 1
Total EAFRD contributions allocated to axis 1 by Member State (absolute value and share of expenditure)

Analysis of funding allocations for these axis 1 measures at individual Member State levels reveals a wide variety of national priorities. For example, Ireland, and to a lesser extent Finland, are using EAFRD to strengthen rural demographics by providing significant incentives for young farmers and freeing up capacity through early retirement schemes. France is also particularly active in setting up young farmers but here the early retirement tool is not generally applied.

Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) in Germany, the Netherlands and Luxembourg tend to emphasise the modernisation of holdings and infrastructure under axis 1. This approach is also favoured in Southern Europe and by many of the new Member States, where reorganisation and modernisation measures concerning physical capital are combined with measures promoting production with higher added values. Particular attention is paid to small and medium-sized holdings in Eastern Europe to ensure that farmers are able to comply with EU competitiveness, environmental and food safety standards.

These traditional farm development support instruments dominate most RDPs but human capital is also actively prioritised in some Member States, such as the United Kingdom and Denmark, which place a greater emphasis on training, information and increasing economic added value.

Many RDPs acknowledge the crucial role that human capital and knowledge play in maximising sustainable benefits from EU farm and forest systems through axis 1. Rural innovation support is recognised as offering a multitude of opportunities to enhance or build strong entrepreneurial capacities.



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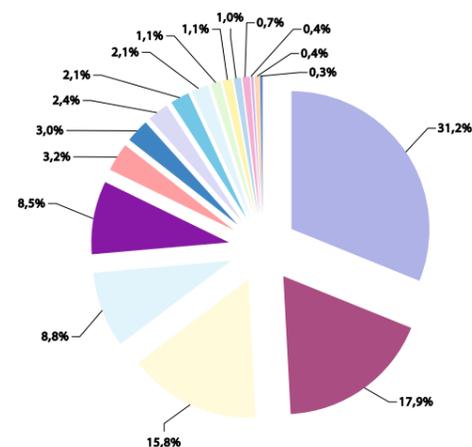


Figure 2 EAFRD axis 1 measures

- 121 Modernisation of agricultural holdings
- 123 Adding value to agricultural and forestry products
- 125 Infrastructure related to the development and adaptation of agriculture and forestry
- 112 Setting up of young farmers
- 113 Early retirement
- 111 Vocational training and information actions
- 141 Semi-subsistence farming
- 126 Restoring agricultural production potential
- 114 Use of advisory services
- 122 Improvement of the economic value of forests
- 124 Cooperation for development of new products
- 142 Producer groups
- 132 Participation of farmers in food quality schemes
- 133 Information and promotion activities
- 115 Setting up of management, relief and advisory services
- 143 Direct Payment (Bulgaria and Romania)
- 131 Meeting standards based on Community legislation

Rural innovation support

All operators in the EU's farm and forestry sectors, irrespective of country or activity, are faced with an increasingly dynamic business environment, and this continues to be fuelled by international competition, technological advances and changing societal patterns. Standing still in such a fast-moving market place effectively means sliding backwards and no producer these days can afford to ignore the important need to innovate.

Innovation is now an essential tool for the long-term viability of European rural areas and, whilst rural innovation practices are becoming more widespread in some Member States, other areas are still lagging behind. The EAFRD provides national authorities with axis 1 resources to help reduce these crucial gaps in rural development performance.

Modernisation trends can be associated with innovation and improved performance in farm or forest businesses. Knowledge

support services for rural areas also represent important development tools and these have been shown to be most effective when tailored to specific regional circumstances. This requires an integrated approach that matches investments in physical capital with active encouragement of human resource development.

Axis 1 provides these resources to help stimulate and support innovative, imaginative and alternative thinking among EU farmers and foresters. Changing attitudes away from traditional, and at times 'narrow' mind-sets into more open-minded, multi-market-oriented and flexible thinking represents a challenge in some areas. Nevertheless, success in this goal will create considerable long-term legacies and so warrants adequate prioritisation by Member States.

Numerous RDP examples exist that are capable of facilitating rural innovation practices and a selection are summarised in the following short case studies.



P. ARRAGON

Supporting young farmers' ambitions in France

France recognises the important role that younger generations play in the growth of its countryside areas and so has devoted, in its RDP for the 'Hexagone', almost 30% of all axis 1 funds to support for young farmers. This accounts for almost 10% of the total French EAFRD allocation. A package of assistance is provided that combines skills training with grant finance for set-up and development costs.

The significance placed on French human capital in rural areas is tailored to try and meet the varying needs of different young farmers. Skills courses are flexible and allow students to pursue their agricultural studies over a longer period of time than previously. This is important since it extends opportunities for young farmers to attain the minimum level of training required to benefit from EAFRD packages, which has now been increased to the equivalent of an agricultural baccalaureate.

Other knowledge-centred assistance is offered via six-month 'start-up' courses which include mentor guidance and equip new farmers with a practical set of technical, business and environmental skills. These include training in areas that relate to their own interests but also other subjects that aim to expand the young farmers' horizons and ambitions.

France's EAFRD start-up policy for young farmers will lead to a higher qualified, better informed, more innovative, and competitive rural work-force. Key issues facing the policy include mechanisms that increase the schemes' uptake to reach an estimated 30% of young farmers who enter rural business life without the benefit of RDP-funded capacity building training.



Forest management in Romania

Romania's forestry and wood industry has traditionally been very important for the country's rural economy, making a significant contribution to employment and exports. In this respect, (and keeping in mind the importance of non-wood forest products such as mushrooms, berries, medicinal plants, etc.), Romanian forestry offers many opportunities for sustainable rural development.

However this sector suffers from deep-rooted issues including: a general lack of well equipped facilities for logging, primary processing or added-value products; forest road coverage is

weak and renders more than 2 million ha practically out-of-reach for technical and economic purposes; fragmentation of ownership creates inefficiencies; foresters remain poorly informed or under-trained about multifunctional roles of modern forests; and problems linked to illegal logging remain important, in spite of recent governmental actions.

Romania's forestry policy is supporting efforts to tackle these challenges. Key initiatives include transfers of forests from public to private owners and the creation of private forest districts as new management structures. Another main policy objective

is to increase the forested area up to the estimated optimum level of between 32% and 35% of the territory.

Accompanying this reorganisation, several axis 1 measures from Romania's RDP are promoting strong, environmentally sound and socially inclusive forest-based businesses. For example, measure 122 concentrates on improving the forest structure and renewal of low productive and degraded forests. Measure 125 supports the development of forest access, flood prevention and

water management activities. Measure 123, dedicated to micro-enterprises, channels assistance towards restructuring and modernising the processing and marketing of forest products (wood and non-wood). In addition to these three core measures, the forestry sector can also benefit from measures 111 and 142 on vocational training, information actions, diffusion of knowledge and the setting-up of producer groups.

Innovative and integrated approaches that combine actions from across these measures are noted as offering particularly effective rural development benefits from Romania's forestry resources.



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P. ARRAGON



Organic cooperation in Italy

Italy's rural development policies include an emphasis on innovative actions that take advantage of the country's considerable agricultural diversity and exploit the uniqueness of regional or local products. Organic agriculture assumes an important role in this policy since Italy is Europe's largest organic producer, with more than 1 million ha certified. The nation's regionally based RDPs appreciate this and, for example, the RDP covering Valle d'Aosta, Puglia, Sicily and Basilicata states that organic farming represents some 16% of total agricultural area in certain regions.

This 'strength in numbers' needs to be adequately combined with cooperation between organic stakeholders, which is being encouraged in various ways. For instance, with specific reference to axis 1 opportunities, organic producers groups are able to take advantage of EAFRD tools that include: innovative investments based on adding value to primary agricultural production, incentives for compliance with Community standards, start-up aid to administer operations of formally recognised producer

groups, vocational training, farm advisory services, and diffusion of scientific knowledge and innovative practices.

EAFRD support targets small, medium or micro-sized enterprises and axis 1 assistance aims to help these farmers to improve the quality of their organic production systems and products. Innovative approaches are encouraged and these may take many different forms. For example, axis 1 support can be used to help farmers adopt new business approaches, such as participating in food quality schemes. Information and advertising campaigns are also part of the 'organic' or 'designated origin' marketing drive that can fund promotional activities for a wide range of rural products, including new innovations.

All of the organic schemes made available under axis 1 are designed to complement axis 2 measures which help improve conditions for organic agriculture.



Promoting quality products in Malta

With limited and fragile natural resources, Malta has adopted a rural development strategy which actively promotes innovation linked to product quality. By relying on traditional production systems, which are both a part of the local heritage and a potential source of economic development, the quality-based approach promoted within the RDP aims to ensure a sound structure of the agri-sector's commodity chains. It also has goals to encourage innovation and strengthen competitiveness through diversification and development of niche products, such as those from organic sources.

In addition to environmental expectations, this approach aims to maintain the enthusiasm of the Maltese population for national products and to target the premiums available from supplying tourist-related businesses on the islands.

Traditional products such as 'cheeselets', sun-dried tomatoes, olive oil, wine, honey, dried figs and other quality products continue to contribute to maintaining a culinary heritage that is much appreciated by consumers. Axis 1 measures will assist Maltese agri-enterprises to improve their customer service approach by providing modern and innovative applications of traditional husbandry methods and horticultural techniques for these products.

Consequently, some 12% of the total axis 1 budget is allocated to the development of quality agricultural products. Measures relating to physical capital and innovation have been prioritised in this area and other measures supporting producer organisations and cooperation are also eligible for EAFRD co-financing of projects that support the development of quality rural products from the country's farm and forestry sector.



F. LERIN

Improving the EU rural environment

Europe's striking and beautiful countryside has been formed by centuries of human activity. Member States are committed to maintaining high quality rural environments, and axis 2 of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development provides significant support for sustainable management of Europe's natural rural resources.

Environmental objectives underpin all activities supported by axis 2 of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). This fundamental driver of axis 2 actions is defined in the EU's Community Strategic Guidelines, which make clear the explicit link between axis 2 and the following EU policy priorities:

- reversing the decline in Europe's biodiversity by 2010
- preserving and developing High Nature Value (HNV) farming and forestry systems and traditional agricultural landscapes
- supporting management of the Natura 2000 network of protected areas
- sustainably managing surface and ground waters, through the Water Framework Directive
- combating climate change.

The importance of axis 2 is emphasised in two EU requirements – that in every RDP at least 25% of the EAFRD contribution (for the four axes and technical assistance) must be allocated to axis 2; and that agri-environment measures financed by EAFRD must be available throughout the territory, in accordance with the Member States' specific needs.

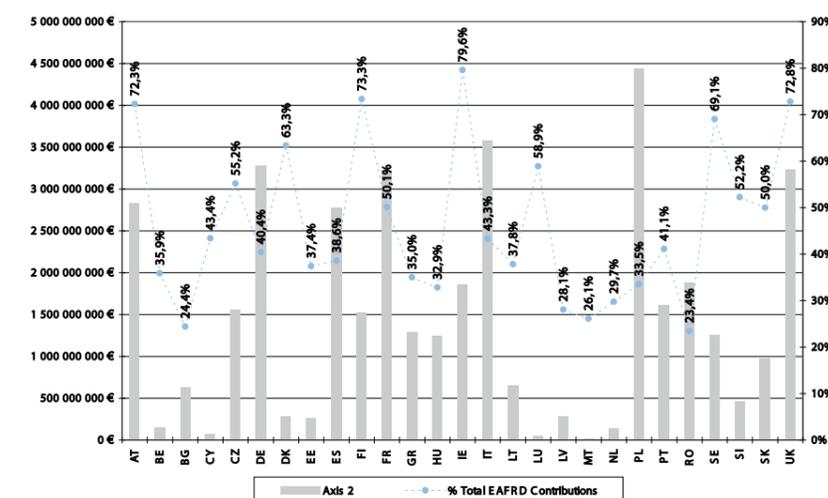
Overall 44% of the total EU-27 EAFRD budget has been allocated to axis 2, but at national level the proportion varies from almost 80% in some Member States to the minimum of 25% in others, as Figure 1 shows.

A wide choice of environmental measures

The breadth of axis 2 measures, and the flexibility to use as much as 80% of their EAFRD allocation for these, offers Member States and regions the freedom to address local priorities. This is an important and valuable opportunity, given the varied nature of environmental issues across the EU.

A key challenge will be to ensure that those regions with the most pressing environmental problems, and the greatest share of Europe's biodiversity, adequately reflect these priorities in the selection of measures and the allocation of funds within their RDPs.

Figure 1: Total EAFRD contributions allocated to axis 2 by Member State (absolute value and share of expenditure)



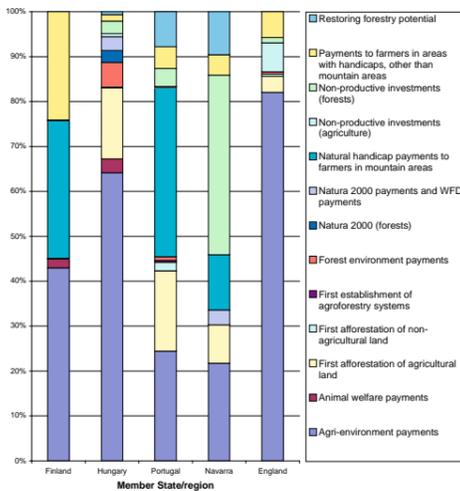
There are 13 different types of axis 2 rural development measure eligible for EAFRD support, including:

- agri-environment and forest-environment payments for managing ecosystems and landscapes, and protecting natural resources. These annual payments per hectare are made on the basis of 5–7-year contracts
- Natura 2000 compensation payments for legal restrictions on the use of farmland and forests. Payments are made annually per hectare and can also be provided for farmland affected by the EU Water Framework Directive
- non-productive investments to support other environmental management
- compensation payments per hectare for handicaps to farming in mountains and other areas. These are also called Less Favoured Area (LFA) payments
- agro-forestry investments to establish non-intensive combinations of trees with farm crops or livestock
- support for afforestation of farmland or other open land, where this will provide environmental benefits
- forest protection to prevent forest fires and to restore forests damaged by fire or natural disasters
- animal welfare payments on 5–7-year contracts to adopt standards above mandatory requirements.

Some of the axis 2 measures have their origins in earlier policies, such as the Less Favoured Area (LFA) support, which first began in 1975. Other axis 2 priorities are relatively new, such as the special emphasis on assistance for HNV farming and traditional agricultural landscapes.

Regional differences in the use of axis 2 rural development measures can be considerable, as shown by Figure 2 below which spotlights the different combinations of RDP support used for environmental conservation actions in Finland, Hungary, mainland Portugal, Navarra (Spain) and England (UK).

Figure 2: Proportion of axis 2 total public expenditure allocated to each measure in five EU regions

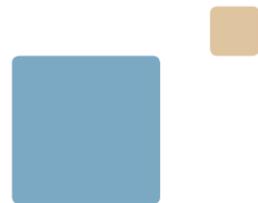


This breakdown of axis 2 commitments in five EU areas shows striking differences in the choice and application of measures. Such variations reflect regional situations and RDP priorities, and indicate a varied pattern of support for agri-environment measures, forest environment actions, non-productive investments, Natura 2000 sites and farmers in areas with natural handicaps.

HNV farming

The HNV farming concept describes those types of farming activity and farmland that can be expected to support high levels of biodiversity or species and habitats of conservation concern. Typically, the highest levels of species richness are associated with semi-natural habitats under low-intensity farming management. There are several types of HNV farmland but they generally share three core characteristics: low-intensity farming, a high proportion of semi-natural vegetation and high diversity of land cover.

It is estimated that more than 30% of farmland across the EU-27 can fall within one of these types of HNV farmland. The map below illustrates the potential distribution of HNV farmland at EU level.



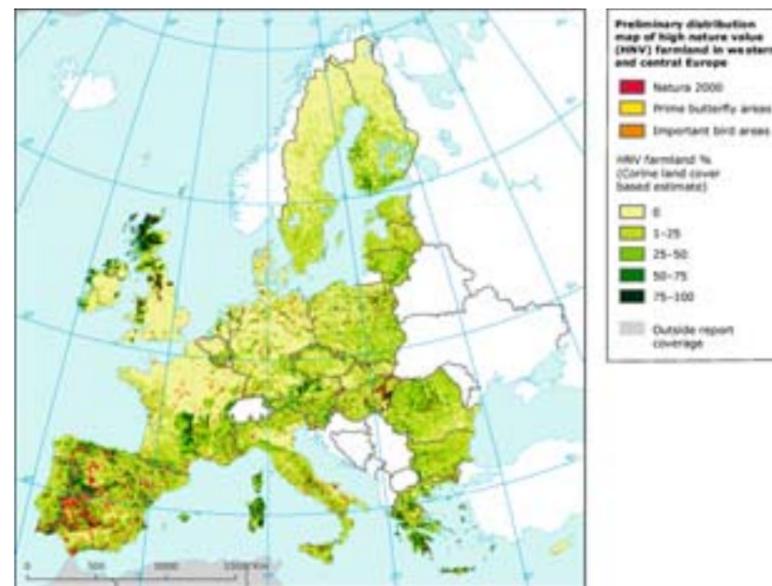
Types of HNV farmland

Farmland with a high proportion of semi-natural vegetation – often livestock systems in marginal areas where sheep, beef cattle, horses and goats graze on unimproved or semi-natural grassland, moorland, heath and Mediterranean scrub at very low densities (e.g. 5–10 ha per cow).

Mosaics of low-intensity farmland – small-scale patterns of crops, grass and fallow, with low use of fertilisers or chemicals, and intervening patches of woodland, scrub, trees, hedgerows and small watercourses.

Farmland supporting rare and protected plants and animals, or populations of European or global importance – these may be found in many different situations, for example the wintering wildfowl that use intensively farmed wet grasslands in the Netherlands.

Figure 3: Likelihood of HNV farmland presence at EU level



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Effects on the distribution of HNV farmland at EU level include structural developments in the agricultural sector, such as intensification, loss of small-scale landscape features, or conversion of arable land to other land uses. These can result in a loss of biodiversity and many HNV farming systems are under threat, because technical and economic changes can create pressures which lead farmers to abandon their traditional agricultural practices.

The EU's Strategic Guidelines recognise these problems by placing a high priority on using axis 2 funds for HNV farming and forestry systems, as well as traditional agricultural landscapes. Achieving this aim for axis 2 will depend on several factors such as: sufficient effort put into identifying HNV land, schemes that are well targeted at HNV farming systems and their associated biodiversity, adequate uptake by the farmers concerned, sufficient funding, both for payments to farmers and for expert staff in delivery and support agencies, and application of consistent monitoring and evaluation methodologies.

Emphasis on monitoring and evaluation

The Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (CMEF) for EU rural development policy contains three HNV indicators, including one which assesses the impact of the entire programme (not just axis 2) on the HNV resources within Member States.

Monitoring and evaluation of these CMEF indicators provides RDP managers with crucial information to keep track of changes in the extent and condition of HNV farmland and forests. The process is however complex, and requires robust baseline information on the extent and condition of the existing HNV resources, against which the impact of the EAFRD can then be measured.

Ongoing monitoring and evaluation remains essential to detect trends in farming and forestry practices and the associated biodiversity. Considerable investment will therefore be needed

between now and 2013 if we are to judge the effectiveness of axis 2 funding in maintaining and developing the EU's HNV resources.

Work carried out by the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development has resulted in a revised Guidance Document to the Member States on the 'Application of the HNV Impact Indicator'. This has been produced to help RDP managers and evaluators establish meaningful methodologies for applying the CMEF HNV indicators. The revised guidance can be accessed online at http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rurdev/eval/hnv/guidance_en.pdf.

Looking ahead

The new focus on HNV farming and forestry should provide the impetus for Member States to recognise and support this irreplaceable biodiversity resource, and the farmers who manage it.

The following case studies illustrate some of the axis 2 schemes that have been designed specifically to support proactive environmental management of HNV farmland and forests.



Corncrake conservation in the Czech Republic

Corncrake birds spend the winter months in Africa and in the spring fly north to nest in the tall, undisturbed grassland meadows of Europe and Russia. These globally threatened birds are shy and rarely seen, but the males have a distinctive rasping call that sounds rather like their Latin name of *Crex crex*.

Corncrake populations declined in Western Europe as grasslands were improved for agriculture and mowing machines replaced scythes. Mowing for silage early in the season destroys the nests, and later the chicks can be lost if they try to escape from mechanical mowers by hiding in the long grass at the centre of the field.

With more than 1 500 male corncrakes and their mates seeking nest sites in the Czech Republic each spring, the government designed a special axis 2 agri-environment measure, in



M. DEMKO

cooperation with expert ornithologists. Annual payments, co-financed by the EAFRD, are available on suitable corncrake breeding areas, mainly grasslands that can be mown.

The grassland must be managed without using fertilizer or manure, and mown late in the season, from the centre outwards, or from one side to the other to allow the chicks to escape. Mowing is not to be carried by a group of mowers, and mown grass must be removed from the field.

The results should provide safe breeding areas and help to improve the long-term conservation status of this rare and valued European species.



Prioritising support for HNV farming systems in Bulgaria

Bulgaria is very rich in farmland biodiversity, and – with neighbouring Romania – has the largest contiguous area of HNV farmland in the EU. Much of this is now threatened by abandonment or intensification.

Bulgaria's RDP gives high priority to HNV farming within axis 2. Specific agri-environment packages are available for restoration and maintenance of HNV under- or over-grazed grasslands. This support promotes traditional mowing methods and provides for specific livestock densities in order to conserve and maintain HNV

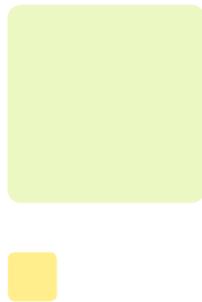
grasslands and associated species through continuation, or re-introduction, of traditional management practices. A temporary package to protect habitats and bird populations in HNV areas has also been introduced. This will remain until equivalent statutory management requirements enter into force in designated Special Protection Areas under the Birds Directive.

An example of this type of axis 2 assistance is the pilot agri-environment scheme that has been launched in the Pirin and Central Balkan National Parks. It aims to support traditional mountain pastoralism in areas threatened by land



KOEN DERIJK

abandonment. The scheme encourages farmers to use traditional patterns of seasonal grazing with shepherds looking after traditional local breeds in high mountain pastures in the summer months. The scheme also promotes the use of Karakachan dogs to protect the grazing livestock from wolves or bears.



NEMUS



Integrated territorial intervention in Portugal

In Portugal, the main agri-environment scheme promotes organic and integrated farming, and supports rare breeds of livestock and varieties of crop plants. More specific biodiversity measures are confined to eight zonal schemes targeted on the Natura 2000 network and the Duoro region. These measures use an innovative approach described as Integrated Territorial Intervention (ITI), which combines highly specific agri-environment and forest-environment measures with non-productive investments.

For example, the ITI in Montesinho-Nogueira offers axis 2 payments for work including: maintaining HNV grasslands and riparian tree galleries (for the benefit of otter, black stork and water pipit); growing non-irrigated grain crops in rotation with fallow (for Montagu's harrier, hen harrier and larks); protecting old chestnut tree groves (a habitat for the marten and the common redstart); and preserving or regenerating indigenous HNV woodlands and high-altitude shrubs.

ITI payments are delivered through a local support structure funded by axis 3, and it is hoped that improved HNV management will lead to new opportunities for marketing local goods and services, to be promoted through the work of the axis 4 Leader Local Action Group.



HNV common grazing land in Wales (UK)

The 800 ha of Cefn Bryn common in south Wales have been used by local communities for thousands of years, and today the Natura 2000 network site is valued for its heathland biodiversity and open landscapes, as well as the structures left by the Neolithic and Bronze Age occupants. There are five landowners and about 100 registered commoners, although only 16 actively graze the land, mostly with sheep.

Bringing common land into an agri-environment scheme is a complex task, but in May 2008 the Cefn Bryn commoners entered a new five-year agri-environment contract. Annual payments averaging £62 (c. €72) per hectare are available for farmers to increase cattle-grazing levels during the spring and summer, with the aim of suppressing bracken and grazing the coarse vegetation which has dominated the wet heathland.

COUNTRYSIDE COUNCIL FOR WALES



Sheep numbers will be limited in winter, to prevent over-grazing of semi-natural habitats, and non-productive investment will be used to clear bracken and scrub for habitat restoration, and to control the spread of invasive species.

The common recently featured in a programme of site visits by the International Association for the Study of Commons, and Cefn Bryn is being used as a model for other HNV common land contracts in Wales.

Enhancing rural quality of life and supporting economic diversification



Quality of life heavily influences the long-term viability of EU rural areas and axis 3 funds have been made available to improve standards of rural living by strengthening local economic activities, increasing access to essential services and supporting rural heritage.

Quality of life is determined by many different social, economic, environmental and cultural elements that interlink and have significant impacts on the demographics of rural areas. For example, poor quality of life often leads to out-migration and can aggravate a downward spiral of depopulation pressures, whereas high quality of life tends to encourage inward investments, thriving services and an attractive, healthy environment.

One of the basic principles of axis 3 of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) is that the long-term prosperity of EU rural areas depends to a large extent on a high quality of life. It acknowledges the roles played by viable rural services and mixed local economies in supporting strong countryside communities. It reflects the shift in rural jobs away from mainstream agriculture and forestry into alternative enterprises and has been designed with an appropriately wide remit to cover the very many development requirements of EU rural residents.

These requirements include farm diversification funds and benefits for other rural businesses, as well as financial aid to improve rural infrastructure, undertake local regeneration programmes and run schemes delivering key social services. In many cases, axis 3 operations are also being coordinated by Local Action Groups (LAGs) that use the Leader method to deliver rural diversification and quality of life strategies within their own multi-axis activities.

Axis 3 allocations

According to the EU Regulation, all Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) have to channel at least 10% of their overall budgets to axis 3 projects. Member States set their own axis 3 funding allocations with the above baseline figure being expanded, if appropriate, to mirror the specific rural development needs identified in each RDP territory.

The application of such flexibility has resulted in regional variations that show axis 3 receiving 29.8% of total

EAFRD resources in the Netherlands and 32.3 % in Malta, whilst other countries have decided their rural areas require smaller allocations. On average, Member States have allocated 13% of their EAFRD budgets to axis 3 and the Figure 1 illustrates how funds for quality of life and economic diversification have been allocated by the RDPs.

A total of €12.2 billion has been committed to axis 3 across all the RDPs, which include allocations of up to €2.7 billion for basic rural services, some €3 billion for village renewal projects, €2.2 billion for enterprise development and a budget of €1.4 billion to help EU farmers diversify their incomes.



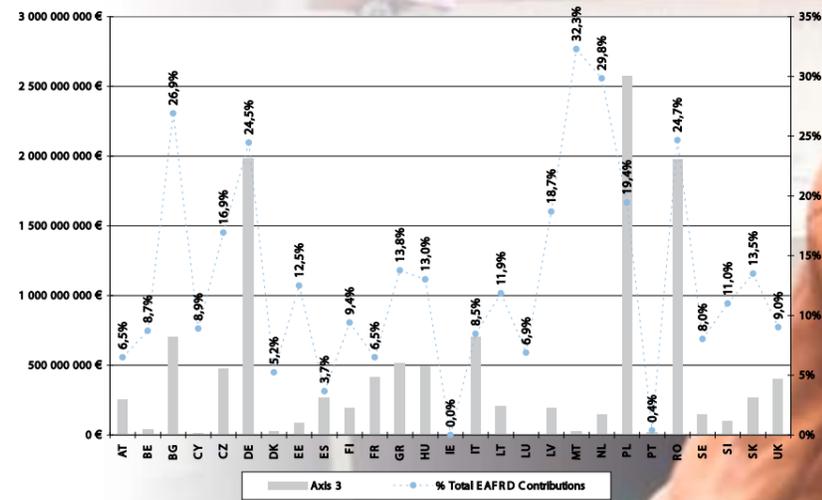


Figure 1: Total EAFRD contributions allocated to axis 3 by Member State (absolute value and share of expenditure)

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The range of rural opportunities available through axis 3 remains impressive and potential developments include:

- business start-up packages combining skills and capital support
- feasibility studies and project management plans
- market surveys for service needs in rural areas
- culture and leisure activities
- establishment of integrated village community and service centres
- energy supplies and other basic services
- reconstruction and modernisation of local infrastructure or buildings and facilities of social importance
- reliable access routes to and from rural areas
- improved facilities for rural artisans and craft manufacturers
- water supply and wastewater management
- protection and management plans for sites of High Nature Value
- broadband infrastructure to reduce 'digital divides'
- community Internet points.

Axis 3 services

Small, medium and micro-enterprises can be assisted by axis 3 in different economic sectors and these types of business support benefits are available to all rural residents. Equal access to development opportunities remains a basic horizontal premise of axis 3 and socially inclusive approaches are actively promoted.

The choice of axis 3 measures has been specially selected to strengthen specific roles that different stakeholders play in sustaining rural communities. For example, the axis measures offer scope for investments in essential services like childcare, shops, education, health,

amenities, and transport, in addition to facilities for elderly residents, women, younger generations and minorities. Infrastructure and multi-purpose community facilities are encouraged. Conservation and upgrading of natural and cultural heritage can also be funded and form part of a local area's tourism development plans.

Measures for training and skills acquisition complement capital finance, offering useful opportunities for all rural residents to maximise their potential. Skills are mostly linked to employment goals and can cover a broad spectrum stretching,

for example, from craft work to customer care and from mechanical engineering to computer programming.

Important axis 3 support is also channelled to boost the effectiveness of collaborative rural developments, with particular emphasis being placed on the bottom-up implementation of LAG-led community regeneration strategies.

Axis 3 priorities are structured around the following funding measures:

- business creation and development
- diversification into non-agricultural activities
- village renewal and development
- basic services for the economy and rural population
- encouragement of tourism activities
- conservation and upgrading of rural heritage
- skills acquisition and animation to prepare and implement local development strategies
- training and information for axis 3 stakeholders.

Wider challenges

Care is being taken to ensure maximum value for money from the significant sums of axis 3 funding and economic sustainability forms a key criterion during assessment of all EAFRD project proposals. Capacity building support is expected to be made available to assist local communities understand the factors that influence viability of business and service ventures. This integrated approach to rural development is designed to help rural areas to help themselves and comparable methodologies have proved to be beneficial during previous Leader programmes.

Monitoring the impact of axis 3 investments may present other implementation challenges since many quality of life outcomes can be qualitative or intangible and difficult to measure. The European Evaluation Network for Rural

Development is aware of these issues and is available to advise RDP managers about how best to track axis 3 progress. In this way national authorities will be able to know what actions are working well and which schemes might need different approaches.

Availability of co-finance can also pose concerns in some areas, where limits on the size of local cash economies might act as an obstacle to rural development. Innovation and flexibility will need to provide solutions to this issue and Member States are tasked to facilitate high absorption levels of the EAFRD. This is expected to encourage adaptable funding strategies that safeguard socially inclusive implementation mechanisms and ensure equal access to axis 3 across EU rural areas.

Special attention is also being paid to help women and young people benefit from the axis 3 funds through targeted schemes and proactive rural development policies.

The Member States' RDPs include an interesting variety of axis 3 policies supporting rural services, quality of life and economic diversification. A small selection of these axis 3 actions is highlighted in the case studies presented overleaf.



Supporting multiple service centres in Hungarian Community Centres

Many small villages in Hungary cannot provide basic community functions, often due to the lack of up-to-date buildings with capacity to host such services. There is also a network of public buildings, such as rural libraries, in need of renovation and, from where additional community functions could be delivered.

With the aim “to improve the accessibility of basic services in the settlements of the rural areas” and as a consequence “to improve the quality of life”, the Hungarian RDP’s axis 3 measure for basic services in rural areas (number 321) presents options for

local rural communities to propose and develop local projects that support such initiatives.

Axis 3 assistance can be used to plan, establish and manage multiple service centres. This includes work involved in: renovating and modernising of buildings, purchasing IT tools for community use, providing training for rural residents, establishing child day-care facilities, and delivering services such as debt, legal and marketing counselling, and other technical expertise.

External and internal renovation of existing General Culture Centres is another type of rural service facility that can be supported by Hungary’s axis 3. These quality of life funds can be used to help integrate different rural development support functions within community buildings and the end result will be a new network of multi-purpose, cost-efficient local services centres for rural villages.



L. FEHÉR



L. JONSSON



Strengthening the viability of Swedish rural products

Axis 3 funds started flowing to Swedish EAFRD project beneficiaries in 2008. These included a network of 32 food producers from Norrbotten County that combined forces in a business network called ‘Food-Producers of the North’.

Their axis 3 project concentrated on improving sales of local products in order to help strengthen the viability of rural businesses. Synergies were sought between producers, logistic services and food marketing firms, all of which are members of the network.

Consumers and retailers were targeted through an information campaign that ran during 2008 and involved raising awareness among grocery store staff about regional food products from Norrbotten. Seminars were delivered, cooking classes were provided and study visits to farms, processing units and gardens were also organised to increase retailers’ knowledge and interest in regional products.

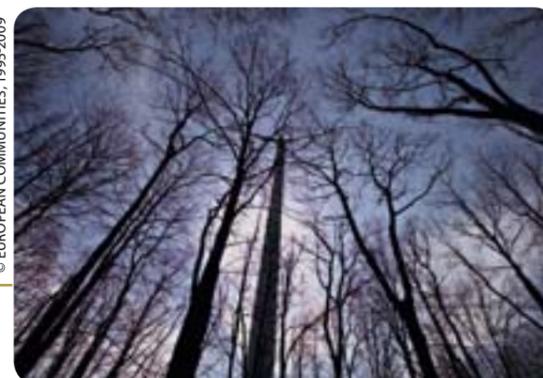
Other initiatives were piloted to encourage local product purchasing and a series of in-store demonstrations was carried out in different parts of Sweden to present samples from the Food-Producers of the North.

The axis 3 project stimulated cooperation between the food producers and this is expected to facilitate future joint marketing, with aims to expand the successes of their 2008 work and further strengthen the viability of Norrbotten’s rural economy.



Community managed facilities in Slovakia

Rural regions in Slovakia are predominantly characterised by varied landscapes, a rich mix of both natural and cultural heritage, developed settlements and strong folklore traditions. However, there are also villages and marginalised areas with underdeveloped technical infrastructure and low competitiveness in local economies. These areas also tend to suffer from declining agricultural production and insufficient infrastructure for enterprise. The absence of key facilities such as community halls, potable water systems or sewage treatment plants, fuel supplies and energy facilities leads to further difficulties in attracting inward investment and can limit tourist visitors. Furthermore, the lack of these essential services has a direct negative impact on local quality of life.



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Slovakia’s axis 3 measures have been designed to help rural communities address these issues and improve their local infrastructure. For example, the Slovakian RDP measure for ‘Village renewal and development’ is providing support to initiatives that demonstrate appropriate improvements in essential infrastructure for rural areas. Eligibility for this axis 3 assistance is wide and includes opportunities for community-managed services as well as mainstream infrastructure investments.

Together with the measure supporting ‘Basic services for the economy and rural population’, EAFRD has been made available for communities to identify their needs and develop appropriate solutions that enhance quality of life. These include infrastructure for protecting environmental conditions and other investments to improve the quality of public services, enhance capabilities for civic associations, expand Internet usage and advance education activities.

Community-led initiatives are encouraged and economic feasibility forms an important part of the projects’ development processes. Securing sufficient and sustainable levels of revenue presents challenges for community facilities and the Slovakian authorities are keen to assist innovative approaches that support successful locally managed facilities.



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Online services for Spanish villages in Castilla-La Mancha

The Spanish region of Castilla-La Mancha is truly rural. More than 54% of the villages have less than 500 inhabitants and almost all the towns and villages have less than 10 000 residents. This relatively low population creates difficulties for sustaining rural services, which, when combined with the lack of local employment opportunities, generates strong incentives for rural inhabitants to move to local towns and cities.

Reducing these depopulation pressures is one of the roles for the RDP that covers Castilla-la-Mancha. Several axis 3 measures in the RDP aim to help improve equal access to services for rural citizens, in order to curb migration trends and make available more of the same range of essential facilities that are present in the regional urban areas.

These measures include restoration of buildings and equipment for health, social welfare, culture and leisure time as well as better access to Internet services, via Broadband at reasonable prices.

Bold targets have been set to secure a high level of coverage of Internet access for rural areas within the RDP territory by the end of the current programme period. This work will help provide opportunities for a range of online facilities to improve quality of life and assist economic diversification.

Mainstreaming the Leader approach

Multisectoral partnership approaches to integrated rural development, using cooperation and networking methodologies, have proved their success during earlier EU Leader programmes and axis 4 offers opportunities to generate similar bottom-up benefits for all four axes in the new EU rural development policy.

The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) Regulation notes that the previous work, piloted and cultivated by Leader Community initiatives, has reached a level of maturity that now enables rural areas to implement Leader methodologies more widely within mainstream rural development programming.

Axis 4 was therefore established as a policy vehicle to broaden Leader approaches, using its key principles of the territorial approach, multisector partnerships through Local Action Groups (LAGs), bottom-up decision-making systems, cross-sectoral implementation strategies, innovation and cooperation and networking.

An important innovative feature in the mainstreamed EAFRD Leader approach is the fact that support will be delivered on the basis of "implementing local development strategies with a view to achieving the objectives of one or more of the three other axes". In other words, rather than a 'stand-alone' initiative, Leader now holds the potential to deliver a much larger and wider set of integrated rural development actions.

Local Action Groups

Throughout the EU, it is anticipated that more than 2 100 LAGs will implement local development strategies. LAGs have always been fundamental to the Leader approach and LAGs will continue to act as EAFRD Leader implementation agents, via axis 4 of Member State Rural Development Programmes (RDPs).

LAGs are based on a public-private partnership and must represent partners from the various locally based socio-economic sectors in the territory concerned. At the decision-making level, the social and economic representatives must make up at least 50% of the local partnership.

The extension of Leader actions will depend heavily on LAGs' capacity to integrate new types of partner, including more representatives from the farming and environmental sectors. Other interesting partnership opportunities exist between LAGs and organisations involved with 'integrated territorial' projects like in Natura 2000 areas. These other types of rural development partners remain likely to be positive about the Leader approach.

Whilst many LAGs from across the EU-27 have now had at least a few years' experience of previous Leader-type funding mechanisms, the prospect of operating within a wider rural development programme or 'mainstreaming' is new to most. This situation may present new challenges and opportunities in obtaining new skills in agri-environmental and environmental forestry schemes, as well as axis 1 type approaches.

Such strategies will be highly innovative for some rural areas and lessons from previous Leader approaches show that innovation can sometimes take time to settle. Leader processes also often require careful nurturing, but the end results regularly justify the efforts invested.

Leader and Innovation

Innovation is one of the features of Leader and it is encouraged by allowing LAGs significant freedom and flexibility in making decisions about the actions they want to support. This approach continues to be embodied in the current eligibility rules for LAG activities.

The emergence of new project ideas is more likely to happen when the LAG is not strictly bound by a fixed menu of measures. Innovation needs to be understood in a wide sense and not simply defined in terms of new or improved technology, but instead by investigation and finding new solutions to the problems of an area. Innovation

Member States have allocated a total of €5.5 billion of EAFRD funding to axis 4 measures which include provision for running LAGs and the implementation of local development strategies.

may mean the introduction of a new product or a new process or a new mode of organisation or penetration of a new market.

LAG governance

Good governance lies at the heart of the Leader approach and all LAGs are tasked to provide strong, equitable and transparent leadership during delivery of their rural development activities.

Decentralised decision-making systems and the responsible application of these by LAG partnerships play extremely important roles in mobilising the full development potential of rural areas. LAGs that are seen as fair and effective by the populations that they serve prove in practice to be more productive and popular. In turn, support for LAG actions increase, as does community confidence, along with the acceleration of bottom-up rural development proposals.

Getting LAG governance right is therefore an important objective for axis 4 stakeholders. Good working relationships between local government and other socio-economic partners within a territory is a crucial ingredient for successful LAG governance. Locally elected government entities must be central to governance within a territory, yet, if LAGs are controlled or dominated by local government, important voices of others can be lost.

LAG managers need to work hard to retain the right balance in this development equation, by ensuring that their LAG's approach produces ongoing benefits for local government, as well as for other stakeholders, and avoids any risk of being considered a threat to democratic processes.

Conclusions

This snapshot of the current situation shows that integrating Leader approaches across all EAFRD axes provides significant scope to apply bottom-up and multisectoral partnership methods to a wide range of rural development actions. Also, the role of governance has clearly been recognised as central to the future of development in the countryside. These two key axis 4 operational factors will undoubtedly pay good dividends in the years to come as EAFRD co-financed actions roll out across rural Europe.

Many examples of good practice Leader methods are already in place around the EU-27 and the following case studies identify a number of these which offer interesting demonstration value for other axis 4 stakeholders.



ISLE OF WIGHT LEADER +

Good governance LAG policy checklist

- ☑ LAG members represent the views of all sections of society within the partnership area, including young people and women.
- ☑ LAG membership remains open for new organisations and individuals who can make a positive contribution to the partnership's activities.
- ☑ Key communities of interest are in no way excluded from the partnership process.
- ☑ LAG members act responsibly and consider the impact of their decisions.
- ☑ LAG members are realistic and base decisions on well-informed viewpoints.
- ☑ LAG members have equal access to appropriate information and training opportunities.
- ☑ Participation of LAG members is central to good governance and practical arrangements (such as timing and location of meetings) are carefully considered and agreed with adequate public notice.
- ☑ LAG operations comply with an agreed set of public procedures. These include transparent systems for appeals against LAG decisions and notification of conflicts of interests.
- ☑ LAG members are willing to propose their own ideas and look at ways to add value to other people's ideas.
- ☑ Governance arrangements are flexible and able to adapt, since the situation in 2009 is not likely to remain the same until 2013.
- ☑ LAG members are willing to listen to different perspectives and respect the opinions of other people.
- ☑ LAG decisions are made on the basis of 'one member one vote' with the chairperson having a casting vote.
- ☑ A clear division of roles is established between strategic and operational levels within the LAG to ensure an independent overview of partnership operations.
- ☑ LAG operations and governance are subject to an annual evaluation by external expertise.

Effective and transparent axis 4 procedures in Poland

Axis 4 is expected to support some 338 LAGs in Poland and this will boost LAG numbers by more than 100% compared with the previous programming period, during which the Leader approach was piloted across rural Poland. Many useful lessons were learnt from earlier Leader approaches and these have helped to strengthen the new methods that are being applied during the delivery of axis 4.

Transparency and efficiency are core targets for the Polish axis 4 procedures that intend to provide clear guidance for LAGs and rural project beneficiaries. Reliable, prompt and user-friendly information regarding grant applications, instructions, project rules, decision-making processes, justification for funding allocations and relevant contact persons are all issues that Polish authorities recognise as being essential to ensure effective implementation of Leader services for local rural communities.

New guidance has been prepared to help clarify the interesting variety of eligible axis 4 activities, which include: the creation, development, processing and marketing of quality rural products, modernisation of tourist information services, local cultural and artistic creativity, community recreational and sports events, restoration of Natura 2000 areas and other

valuable heritage resources, as well as others. Beyond the specific actions listed, several other measures within axis 3 will be implemented via the Leader approach, and indeed will constitute the bulk of the Leader axis.

Wide and active partnerships are also being fostered to guarantee strong coordination and cooperation between key stakeholders. Other good practices are being established in monitoring, evaluation and networking which intend to build on past experiences and contribute to the efficient delivery of axis 4 activities.



A. MORZYK



LAG selection and monitoring in Lithuania

Lithuanian's rural areas were introduced to the benefits of Leader approaches by international cooperation projects during EU membership preparations. These demonstrated successful methodologies for producing bottom-up rural development strategies and involved guidance on LAG governance procedures. Such useful experience provided models for other rural communities to follow and has resulted in a network of over 40 Lithuanian LAGs that have been allocated dedicated EAFRD budgets from axis 4 and axis 3.

Distribution of these LAG resources is managed through a robust and transparent selection process based on criteria such as LAGs: analysis of social and economic rural development needs in their territory; vision, priorities, objectives and implementation measures regarding sustainable use of local resources; plans for mobilising rural communities; strategy for participation in networking activity; contributions to national and EU strategic goals; involvement of local residents; intentions to support less active and/or socially isolated rural residents; and management capacity to implement the local development strategy and to administer public funds.

Straightforward monitoring indicators are being encouraged to assist the latter LAG management tasks. This includes promoting consistent measurement definitions for indicators such as job creation, training courses graduates and proportion of population covered by LAG activities.

These common monitoring methodologies help to validate RDP managers' data and allow transparent measurement of axis 4 effectiveness, which is also evaluated in Lithuania through on-the-spot project checks and a regular reporting system that seek feedback about both positive and problematic aspects of LAG activities.



T. HUDSON



H. PIIPPO-FAIR



Expanding equitable LAG membership in Finland

The Leader approach has been implemented in Finland since 1996 and during this time Leader has been 'mainstreamed' from a geographical perspective to cover nearly all rural areas. The aim for the current programming period is to integrate the activities of Leader through broadening its content in order to serve the objectives of all four rural development policy axes.

The new and increased scope of Finnish LAGs activities has strengthened their commitment to ensure an equitable membership structure. Previous Leader approaches have been retained that safeguard decision-making powers between social, economic and environmental partners. This continues to attract an even distribution of partners from municipalities, rural inhabitants, local associations and enterprises. Special attention is paid to including younger members of rural communities, as well as women in the LAG partnerships.

It is felt that the Leader approach is especially appropriate in Finland through bringing together key actors and resources in sparsely populated areas. EAFRD LAGs now therefore need to be comprehensive in terms of both geographical coverage and also sectoral operations. This range of activities includes access to RDP measures supporting: development of new products, processes and technologies, vocational training and information, agri-environment payments, rural regeneration, and cooperation projects with interterritorial or transnational partners.

Membership procedures for LAGs adopt inclusive principles and are made available for public scrutiny and new LAG members have been welcomed to reinforce multi-axis capacities. This has helped to strengthen LAG skill bases and introduce new development ideas for farm diversification, rural services, environmental sustainability, business innovation and community animation.



New LAGs in south-east England – forming for the right reasons

In south-east England the local Regional Development Agency (RDA) is using axis 4 funded Leader approaches as an effective tool to address complex rural challenges associated with: social and economic exclusion, the future of agriculture, and environmental pressures from development.

Here, axis 4 funds are being used to support the establishment and management of LAGs, which have direct access to axis 3 funds for work to improve quality of life and enhance employment opportunities for endogenous communities. EAFRD innovations regarding the increased scope of LAG activity is already attracting a wide group of stakeholders, and these are being encouraged to agree and set their own rural development objectives from the outset.

'Forming for the right reasons' is an important message that is being promoted by the RDA's LAG start-up support programme which applies a comprehensive LAG development methodology. This is based on bottom-up decision making and involves training for new LAG members. Other capacity-building initiatives include peer learning sessions where new and old members from different LAGs are able to share experiences and transfer knowledge.

New LAGs are now being set up to cover most rural parts of the region and older LAGs are refocusing their approach. One example is the WARR partnership in Sussex, where local organisations and people have decided to come together to identify badly needed new employment opportunities, particularly for the rural communities' young people.



D. JEPSON

EAFRD programming: outcomes from the synthesis of RDP ex ante evaluations

An EU-wide evaluation project has synthesised outcomes from the ex ante evaluations of all 94 Rural Development Programmes, and has drawn a set of recommendations in view of further strengthening the important progress noted in defining Rural Development Programmes in line with the concrete needs identified in the programme areas of the different Member States.

The introduction of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) placed an increased emphasis on the evaluation of the Rural Development Programmes (RDPs). Among others, this involves establishing a system of ongoing evaluation, for which the ex-ante evaluation of RDPs can be seen as the starting point.

A large compilation of useful and interesting findings were identified during the ex ante evaluations. A synthesis of these evaluation reports was commissioned by the European Commission and findings from the synthesis exercise have been published in full on http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/eval/reports/rurdev/index_en.htm. The overall objective of the synthesis was to summarise and analyse the ex ante evaluations, with a focus on expected results and impacts of RDPs.

Specific objectives included the identification of elements for improving the monitoring and evaluation of RDPs, the provision of datasets, the identification of European trends, the assessment of the overall coherence of the RDPs with the EU strategic priorities, as well as the investigation about the extent to which the needs of rural areas in the Member States are appropriately covered by rural development measures

Ex ante evaluation and programming

Concerning the approaches to ex ante evaluations, the synthesis showed that these were carried out in an interactive

and iterative way, with continuous support from the evaluators to the programming authorities. A broad range of methods was applied to ensure that this intensive coordination process led to improvements in the quality of RDPs. Most of the recommendations issued by the ex ante evaluators were taken into account during the preparation of the final RDPs, although this process was not always formally reported in the programming documents and/or in the ex ante evaluation reports.

The Member States devoted considerable efforts in the development of their strategies, which are based on a thorough assessment of the needs of their respective programme areas through SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis methods.

Rural areas' needs identified by the RDP SWOTs included, among others: structural adjustments for rural areas and modernisation of methods to address productivity deficits, fragmentation, and access to capital; conservation actions to tackle loss of biodiversity; and support to overcome lack of specialisation, diversification obstacles and quality of rural sector products.

A number of elements in need of further improvement were identified by the synthesis evaluators as regards the definition of the RDP strategies. For example, the scale of the needs identified

was considered not always to be matched by an appropriate and balanced level of support.

Inclusive approaches

The principles of subsidiarity and proportionality were generally carefully considered during the programming process, especially in those Member States that implement regional programmes. However, in some cases the lack of operational details made it difficult to understand how these two concepts are expected to be applied in practice.

The further empowering of Leader-type partnerships, and of other de-concentrated or decentralised bodies, was seen by the synthesis evaluators as a means for improving subsidiarity. Equally, intensive inter-service consultations, adequate steering structures, standardised information flows and the strengthening of local implementation bodies (e.g. Local Action Groups) were considered as relevant mechanisms for increasing the RDPs' internal and external coherence.

The concept of complementarity was generally interpreted by RDPs in the sense of avoiding overlaps between different funds. Synergies between different interventions were pursued to a lesser extent, although good practices in this respect were identified, particularly in 'smaller' Member States.

Programming links

In most of the RDPs, logical links were established between general, specific and operational objectives, and expected results. Nevertheless, the logic of the intervention was not always expressed in a systematic way, and different terminology was sometimes used with respect to the different levels of intervention. This was seen as a potential area where the European Evaluation Network could provide guidance, in view of a more consistent approach to programming throughout the EU.

RDP objectives were considered consistent with those of the National Strategy Plans. However, the actual allocation of funds between the different axes did not always appear balanced with respect to the priorities of the national strategies.

The environmental and sustainability policy goals of the EU's Gothenburg agenda were deemed to be well incorporated and targeted by the RDPs. Lisbon goals regarding economic growth and prosperity were referred to, especially with respect to axis 1 measures. Overall, coherence with these overarching EU objectives was ensured, although in a number of cases the stated coherence was not concretely demonstrated.

EAFRD measures

The ex ante evaluations referred to a range of lessons learned from previous programming periods. These included issues such as: improving coherence and complementarity between different policies and interventions, setting clear strategic priorities and reaching significant concentrations of funds, increasing flexibility of funding through simplification and reduction of transaction costs, strengthening bottom-up-based strategies, and improving the mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the programmes. These lessons were incorporated into the current programmes to a varying extent.

Around half of the ex ante evaluations stated that the overall balance between different measures is appropriate with regard to the needs identified and the objectives established. However, the synthesis team considered that this conclusion should have been better supported by evidence (e.g. by using data matrixes or tables comparing objectives and budgets per measure).

The other half of the ex ante evaluations either noticed a concentration of resources towards agriculture, the environment or rural diversification reflecting a clear strategic orientation, or did not examine the relative distribution of funds between axes and measures. In the first case, the observed concentration of funds on a relatively limited number of measures was not always considered by the synthesis evaluators as fully justified with respect to the needs identified.

Expected impacts

Positive economic, social and environmental impacts of RDPs were generally expected by the ex ante evaluators. These impacts were seen as coherent with the rural development problems identified in the respective programme areas. Synergies between different measures were frequently reported on relevant issues such as biodiversity or the strengthening of the social capital in rural areas.

Quantification of performance targets for the seven common impact indicators proved to be a challenge for the programming authorities and the ex ante evaluators. For example:

- Some impact indicators were only assessed in a qualitative way, thus making their comparisons difficult, both between different RDPs and over time
- Different methodologies were used, in particular as regards the bottom-up aggregation of the effects of different measures/axes at programme level – a fact that may create problems for the uniform aggregation of these indicators at European level
- Possible trade-off effects between different measures and axes (e.g. effects of measures in different axes on biodiversity) were rarely assessed, which may entail the risk of losing important information regarding either synergetic effects or possible inefficiencies in the implementation of the programmes
- Where quantitative targets had been provided, differences occurred between methodologies that were planned to monitor, measure, analyse and present the data. Such inconsistencies in the application of common indicators can create difficulties in synthesising data at EU level.

In light of the above, the synthesis evaluators recommended further development of the EC guidance documents concerning the use of indicators, in view of ensuring more consistent approaches for the assessment of impacts across the EU.

Monitoring and evaluation systems

The procedures established for the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) of RDPs tend to reflect the respective requirements established in the EAFRD Regulation. Some ex ante evaluations provided only limited information about the systems for collecting and processing monitoring data. This was considered due to the timing of the ex ante evaluations, which were generally carried out at a time where the M&E systems had not yet been finalised.

In this respect, the synthesis evaluators saw a better planning of the ex ante evaluations as a possible means for increasing the role of the evaluations in the definition of appropriate M&E systems.

A number of innovative approaches to developing M&E systems were identified, such as creating synergies with pre-existing data collection systems at local, regional and national levels.

Monitoring indicators were generally established following the requirements set out in the CMEF Handbook, although not all programmes have exhaustively quantified them. Other concerns were recorded in establishing specific programme indicators, in particular for axis 2 measures.

A survey of managing authorities, evaluators and members from RDP

monitoring committees was used to assess how the new concept of 'ongoing evaluation' was received and applied. The feedback obtained confirmed that ongoing evaluation is generally seen as a useful instrument to improve the effectiveness of programme management, and that substantial effort has been made to implement it.

When referring to possible future needs to implement the system of ongoing evaluation, issues involving methodological support were often mentioned. Common guidelines were requested to help the quantification of indicators related to measures of axis 2 and 3. Support concerning data collection was also mentioned, although without referring to concrete needs.

The expectations for the European Evaluation Network are well tuned to its planned activities: methodological support, provision of information, establishment of a European platform for communication, networking and exchanges of good practices.

Overall conclusions

Substantial efforts have been made in the Member States to identify RDP measures that correspond to the needs of EU rural areas. These were carefully considered during the programming phase for RDPs, but some difficulties remain, in particular concerning the quantification of indicators and target levels. For example, the fact that there is only limited data about the extent to which some measures are expected to address rural needs raises uncertainty about whether such measures represent the best choice for addressing the different needs.

The new 'Objective-led' approach to EAFRD programming has been adopted by the Member States, although it has not yet been fully absorbed by all countries, nor by all the evaluators. Key areas for capacity building were still noted in developing the logical sequence between the RDPs' SWOT analysis and subsequent formulation of intervention rationales, overall objectives and associated measure-level actions within the axes. Further advice and training in these areas was thought necessary to achieve a full coverage of 'Objective-led' approaches, and avoid cases of 'funding-driven' approaches during the programming of EAFRD support packages.

Axis 1 and axis 2 receive the majority of funds from the EAFRD. This may signify that Member States still see 'Rural Development' as a predominantly agricultural and forestry policy, rather than as an integrated development policy for rural areas embracing all economic sectors and parts of the rural society.

The recommendations from the synthesis evaluators focused on the importance of defining clear strategic priorities for EU rural development that should be linked to concrete measure-level commitments and actions. The RDP mid-term evaluation process in 2010 was seen as an opportunity for assessing this issue further, in view of possible refinements of the programmes.

The synthesis identified a need for consistent approaches to M&E across the EU. At the same time the synthesis evaluators considered that the requirements for the M&E of RDPs should be better tailored to the size of each programme. In this respect, they concluded that more cost-effective systems could be promoted by providing more flexibility concerning the indicators to be applied in the different RDPs.

Rural Europe now contains a significant proportion of the EU population, who between them hold a vast wealth of rural development experience and knowledge. This section of the EU Rural Review magazine shines a spotlight on a few of these rural citizens and presents three interviews with different rural development practitioners working in different parts of rural Europe.

The interviews cover the three thematic axes of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and provide some interesting perspectives, as well as useful practical advice, about assisting farm competitiveness, managing natural heritage and achieving rural quality of life objectives.

Building the capacity of Poland's agricultural sector

L. ŹLIŃSKI

Mr Wiktor Szmulewicz is President of the National Council of Agriculture Chambers in Poland and runs a 60 ha cattle farm in the Mazovia region. Wiktor has a long history of professional rural development interests, which date back to his degree studies at the Warsaw University of Life Sciences.

As an active member of rural society he has played leading roles in founding and supporting rural development organisations, including the only private liceum in his local area. In addition to his President duties with the Agriculture Chamber of the Mazovia region and the National Council of Agriculture Chambers, he is also the honorary President of a cooperative bank that provides funding for agri-businesses.

Being a producer of both dairy and beef products, Wiktor is interested in encouraging the Polish agri-food sector to maximise all the possible benefits that are available from the EAFRD. He is aware that Polish farms can do well

from schemes that help spread rural skills and modernise productivity in order to increase competitiveness and improve quality standards.

Tell us about an interesting and recent rural development project that you have worked with.

The National Council of Agriculture Chambers is the main representative body of Polish farmers and it has been heavily involved in initiating a large number of different rural development actions across the countryside. All of these have goals to improve the standard of living for our rural communities and help create better conditions for the farming sector.

A considerable proportion of our projects are connected with increasing know-how regarding agricultural production techniques. Most of these projects are co-financed by EU and Polish public sector funds, which have been extremely constructive in helping us to provide fresh information for farmers, like myself, about

different situations and factors affecting various commercial markets for our rural products.

One point that I personally find very useful is the information that the Chambers provide about new acts of law and other legal matters, since up-to-date knowledge about these administrative procedures is increasingly necessary for Poland's farmers if they are to deal successfully with subsidies, grants and regulations from the Common Agricultural Policy.

We provide training programmes for farmers on these types of topic, as well as on many other information and capacity building areas. In my opinion, the training sessions not only provide our members with new key skills but they also provide an excellent opportunity for farmers to meet, network and spend time talking with technical experts.

The high level of interest from farmers in our skills development schemes demonstrates their commitment to

making changes and innovating their businesses. I believe that this is so necessary in today's rural world and we often work in partnership with other organisations and research institutes to make sure that we provide Poland's farmers with the most appropriate and relevant information.

As an example, I recall a capacity-building project that the National Council of Agriculture Chambers ran in cooperation with regional chambers and the Animal Husbandry Institute. This delivered a very worthwhile and well-received programme of advice and guidance about on-farm livestock feed production systems, as well as new regulations about the feed standards. More than 5 000 farmers have received our support during over 200 training courses run as a part of this project.

Further information about the National Council of Agriculture Chambers' rural development activities is available from our website at www.krir.pl.

What do you find most rewarding or satisfying about working and living in your part of rural Europe?

First and foremost I am a farmer and I became a farmer because I enjoy working with nature and working with animals. This vocation of mine can at times be very hard work but it always gives me lots of satisfaction.

My rural colleagues and I enjoy our occupations and we feel very attached to our communities and the soils that support us. Our rural lifestyles provide us with many rewards and represent the foundation stones of our regional traditions. Like other countries in the EU, Poland has a lot of family farms and the familiar character of our own businesses provides us with a certain sense of security, as well as a motivation to remain operational so that we can pass on the 'fruits of our labour' to our children.

We realise that this aspiration is not as straightforward as it may have been before. We know that our agriculture needs to develop in order to stay alive and remain a powerful economic force in the countryside. I personally believe that this process must be tackled on multiple levels.

The EAFRD can help us with this work which, as well as using conventional rural development tools, should also feature more awareness raising about the benefits that farmers produce, since not everyone understands the value of our work in providing quality food, maintaining landscapes and conserving wildlife habitats.

What do you think are the main issues, challenges and opportunities for rural development in your part of Europe and area of expertise?

Every country has its own specific situation, which in turn gives rise to a set of particular challenges. My experience of other countries and meetings with farmers from around the EU shows me that we all have different ways of approaching common rural development issues. I think that this diversity is a strength, and the challenge for all of us is how we can learn from each others' experiences. I know that the European Network for Rural Development will help us in this challenge and I welcome the work that it is doing.

One point that I would like to make about this process is that we need to keep looking at rural Europe as a whole and we should avoid compartmentalising or labelling different parts of the EU. We are all European citizens and that is more important than if we are from Eastern, Western, Northern, Southern or outermost Europe.

Wherever we are from, one of the most crucial rural challenges we face is mobilising people from the countryside to take a proactive role in their area's development. In Poland, our experience with Leader methodologies has proved that there are many gains to be made from bottom-up approaches and my work with the Chambers shows me that cooperative approaches can be highly cost-effective, as well as stimulating.

What needs to be done, and by who, and how in order to address these challenges, and to take full advantage of the opportunities?

This is a sizeable topic and I have already mentioned some of the things that I feel are important. I would underline my belief that the activation of people living in rural areas is very important and we take this issue very seriously in the Polish Agriculture Chambers. We are all involved in our Local Action Groups (LAGs) and we can see the synergies available from multisectoral integrated rural development strategies.

Concerning the promotion of uniting farmers in producer groups, we are taking a leading role in identifying relevant capacity-building topics and then organising local training courses for our members in these subject areas.

Unfortunately the process of improving the overall agrarian structure is much more complicated. Various options continue to be explored for this and it will help when Polish farmers are able to increase the size of their agricultural units, since this will allow enhanced economies of scale and better productivity ratios. I believe that government needs to help speed up this process by facilitating efficient procedures and farmer-friendly paperwork.

What types of useful lessons have you learnt during your rural development work and what would be in your 'top three' pieces of advice to other practitioners?

As the President of the National Council of Agriculture Chambers I meet a lot of people and I know that dialogue is the key to success for most rural development work, especially in difficult situations between organisations or individuals with different opinions and priorities. It is good to talk, and this is always the best way, not to mention often ultimately the only way, to reach the right type of mutual solution.

My second piece of advice reiterates what I have said before about understanding each other and seeing EU rural areas as a whole. This is really important to me for long-term relations and balanced, harmonised growth in the EU.

Lastly, my experience with networks, producer groups, cooperatives and LAGs tells me that working together, setting collective goals, and implementing partnership approaches, such as the Polish Chambers' knowledge-strengthening training schemes, are really very effective forms of rural development and I am glad that the EAFRD will be able to support a lot more of this collaborative action.

“...we know that our agriculture needs to develop in order to stay alive and remain a powerful economic force in the countryside...”



Joined-up approaches to EAFRD delivery in Scotland

A. BRYAN

Ms Amanda Bryan has been actively involved in Scottish rural development for over 15 years, during which time her expertise has been recognised via appointment to several high-profile professional positions. These include chairing BBC Scotland's Rural Affairs and Agriculture Advisory Committee from 2001 to 2006 and chairing the North Areas Board of the UK government agency Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) from 2004 to 2007, which she joined in 1997 as its youngest ever Board member. Amanda still serves on the Main Board of SNH and her current work schedule is very much connected to the different EAFRD axes.

Holding a Masters degree in Marine Resource Management, Amanda worked in coastal zone conservation before taking on the role of manager for a Scottish Leader II LAG. Her Leader responsibilities were also combined with tasks involved in the running of a PESCA Programme providing EU funding support for isolated rural fishing communities on Scotland's west coast.

Now working primarily in the field of rural community development, her current portfolio includes a selection of economic development, environmental management and social support projects. A particularly interesting aspect of her work has involved assisting the University of the Highlands and Islands make use of various EU funds to implement its research and higher education courses.

These courses are delivered through a network of localised education facilities that provide skills training to young people, professionals and mature students from rural areas on a very broad mix of topics, ranging from agronomy and forestry to renewable energy and heritage management. The University has been recognised for its good practice in using innovative ICT approaches to provide accessible education facilities for isolated and sparsely populated rural areas.

Amanda continues to live and work in the Scottish highland countryside from her home base near Inverness, where she plays an active part in local community life, such as helping to develop plans for a new village hall.

Tell us about an interesting and recent rural development project that you have worked with.

Scottish Natural Heritage is a partner in the SEARS (Scotland's Environmental and Rural Services) programme which takes an innovative approach to facilitating access to the EAFRD, as well as to national sources of sustainable development assistance, for people in rural Scotland.

Our work with previous EU rural development plans identified the benefits that could be achieved when all of the main government bodies worked together in a coordinated manner to deliver integrated services for rural communities. The Scottish government were very keen to build on their experiences of 'joined-up' approaches and undertook a consultation exercise to find ways of improving rural development services for farmers, foresters and other rural actors.

Results from this feedback process found that some people in the countryside were not sure which organisation they needed to deal with about different types of

rural development issue. This tended to mean that these people ended up being passed around between organisations. The assortment of government agency websites also assumed that their customers knew about what information they wanted to find on specific subjects, but in reality this was frequently not the case. Both these problems were exacerbated by the fact that information services within the different rural and environmental agencies tended to operate rigidly within their own area of responsibility.

Findings from the rural consultation process led to the introduction of the SEARS approach in June 2008. The SEARS partnership includes nine different government bodies and covers all four axes of the EAFRD. This streamlined approach represents a very interesting model for joined-up delivery of RDP assistance and we have been working hard to ensure that our objectives of a 'one door, any door approach' will provide a much better customer-focused service for EAFRD beneficiaries.

SEARS covers both Common Agricultural

Policy (CAP) pillars as well as all the other main sources of rural development services that are available to Scottish rural communities. For EAFRD applicants, the introduction of SEARS means that they will no longer have to seek advice from numerous different organisations, whose advice was not always the same. What happens now is that all staff dealing with enquiries in the SEARS organisations will be able to take ownership of a customer's query and either get back with an answer or put the customer in contact with the official who can answer the question.

A new general enquiry phone number has been created so that customers will no longer be passed around because the person they speak to 'does not deal with that'. Furthermore, by using the new SEARS web portal, customers will find it easier to identify which organisations provide which type of rural development support.

For example, our streamlined application processes now means that that SNH's Natural Care grants, Forestry Commission grants and agricultural grants can all be accessed through the SEARS website

section titled 'Rural Development Contracts – Land Managers' Options'. This allows land managers to develop a single plan and funding application for their development proposals, rather than having to deal with several separate organisations and separate batches of bureaucracy.

SEARS is obviously a very ambitious project and some aspects may require a bit of tweaking but I believe it is very much a step in the right direction. The 'one door, any door approach' offers mutual benefits for both RDP managers and RDP beneficiaries. As such, I think it could offer useful demonstration value in joined-up approaches for other EU rural areas. More information about SEARS is available through the web portal at www.sears.scotland.gov.uk.

What do you find most rewarding or satisfying about working and living in your part of rural Europe?

Rural Scotland has transformed over the last couple of decades. Certainly in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland we have seen an increased awareness of our high-quality resources both in terms of our communities and our environment. It is a great place both to live and work and this is reflected in the significant population increases we have seen in parts of the region.

The availability and accessibility of EU development funds have made a huge positive difference to the viability and confidence of rural communities. A quote from the final evaluation of the Leader programme that I managed says it all "The principal legacy...is an awareness that the community is important and that a sense of community can be achieved through small projects. Small projects which get people working together help bring communities together and to realise that change can be achieved."

Rural Scotland is now a place where we as communities really want to be, rather than a place where we have to stay because we have no or limited options.

What do you think are the main issues, challenges and opportunities for rural development in your part of Europe and area of expertise?

The core issues that have been driving the EU's CAP Health Check are those that we need really to be focusing on. Specifically priorities such as the need to combat and adapt to climate change, protect biodiversity as an economic resource and make best use of the opportunities available for renewable energy.

These are all things that SNH has recognised within its Corporate Strategy and issues that I am hearing time and time again both at policy level and when working with communities. It is good that these issues have been recognised through the CAP Health Check which will provide an important tool in helping Scottish farmers and other rural actors tackle these issues.

What needs to be done, and by who, and how in order to address these challenges, and to take full advantage of the opportunities?

That's a big question but a good place to start is to ensure that public, private and community sector agencies work together in finding solutions that deliver real benefits on the ground.

It is great to see the partnership working approach that was piloted through Leader LAGs now working its way through into the EAFRD's axis 1 and axis 2 activity. We also need to recognise that already a lot of good work has been done in this area and we should be learning from that and not 'reinventing too many wheels'.

Other organisations that I'd like to mention which are helping to address some of the big rural challenges in my part of Scotland include the Euromontana association. This pan-European grouping has been doing some interesting work on non-market public goods and the Northern Periphery Programme has also been making good progress on sustainable approaches to wood fuel developments and environmental tourism.

What types of useful lessons have you learnt during your rural development work and what would be in your 'top three' pieces of advice to other practitioners?

My main piece of advice will probably not come as a big surprise to seasoned rural development practitioners like your readers, but to me it remains absolutely essential that we adopt an integrated approach to rural development. This needs to balance economic, social and environmental objectives and linked to this an ability to coordinate different sources of EU rural development assistance.

An example of how this works in practice would be the remote community of Applecross, located in Scotland's Wester Ross area. This dispersed population has experienced a huge change in its prospects over the last 10 years, from a declining ageing community numbering just over 200, to the now vibrant community that has seen its population grow by some 40% during just a decade.

Such progress has been achieved by the development of a pier, a targeted training programme in rural skills, construction of a path network, various community forestry projects and support for the production of fresh local food. All this work was funded with aid from a range of sources, including all four Structural Funds, and these projects have provided a platform for a wide range of private sector and community businesses. A point worth noting is that the achievements made in Applecross perfectly illustrate the huge benefits that can be gained from carefully planning rural development activities.

For me, rural planning should always aim to include young people and generally be as inclusive as possible. While we are seeing increased populations in some areas we still have a missing generation in other rural areas, with a below average percentage of young people between 18 and 35. The development of the University of the Highlands and Islands is seeking to tackle this gap and initiatives such as a full-time Youth Chairperson for the Highland Council municipality will also start to address more issues that are

relevant to young people, and so make staying in rural areas a real option.

Finally, I think we need to get better at formally recognising the huge amount of voluntary effort and commitment that goes into making things happen in our communities. Without this many of the improvements we see in our rural areas simply would not happen.

For example, I am currently undertaking work with a community woodland group on the edge of Inverness. Their project involves a significant redevelopment plan of woodland management actions, freshwater habitat improvements, open grassland management, path development, interpretation and the provision of visitor infrastructure. We have calculated that the group's voluntary time contribution sums to around €25 000 towards a total project cost of some €235 000. This contribution does not even recognise the huge amount of time and effort that it has taken to develop the project plan, involve the community and secure the funding required. We rely on people in rural areas to make things happen so we need to recognise their value.



“...we rely on people in rural areas to make things happen so we need to recognise their value...”



A. BRYAN





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Conserving rural culture in France's Auvergne region

Mr Samuel Houdemon works as a rural development practitioner in France's Auvergne region, where he lives with his family in the small village of Diènné. Surrounded by mountains and situated at an altitude of 1 150 metres, the village is home to a population of around 250 inhabitants.

Delivering rural development support, through his work with the area's LAG, in this type of terrain poses a mix of challenges and opportunities which Samuel takes an active interest in. As a Masters graduate in agricultural engineering he is aware of the important role that both farming and forestry play in underpinning the local rural economy, which also makes good use of its tourism assets, visitor attractions and community skill base.

The region's pristine environment and breathtaking landscapes remain essential rural development resources, and sustainable approaches are fully integrated into Samuel's work with over 100 communes from around the Saint Flour Haute Auvergne LAG territory.

EU funding continues to provide a useful mix of rural development support in this sparsely populated area and Samuel is looking forward to the new possibilities that are available from the EAFRD. In particular, he is keen to harness axis 3 and axis 4 resources to help increase quality of life by strengthening local economies, improving access to rural services and enhancing the potential of his region's natural environment.

Tell us about an interesting and recent rural development project that you have worked with.

We have been active for a number of years now in welcoming new people to come and to settle in our rural area. In one commune that I work with, they had been using an old school building as a visitor centre. This had been refitted to welcome groups of people but the local mayor was aware that the building could be used for other beneficial community development activities as well.

We assisted the mayor and his colleagues to examine the options and feasibility of different uses for the school building. The answer came with a business proposal to encourage a new set of visitor services for both adults and children. We helped the mayor to find a family that could run the business and after six months of preparation the Lerige family, with their two children, moved in during the summer of 2007. Their new business venture is now up and running helping groups of visitors to discover the local food, heritage and landscape of the Cantal Aubrac region.

This project has not only helped diversify our local economy and attract additional tourist income to the area but the new residents have also made important contributions to sustaining the viability of their village community and its services. You can learn more about this project online at www.lescolchiques.fr.

What do you find most rewarding or satisfying about working and living in your part of rural Europe?

France is a country where the population density varies a lot. Here in the Auvergne region we are very lucky to live in a mountainous environment because we can benefit from the proximity of the countryside and its natural beauty, clean air, access to excellent winter skiing conditions, wide-open spaces for walking or horse-riding, and even better to have fresh eggs, milk and the local 'Salers' cheese.

We are fortunate that the cost of living in rural areas is less than in the cities for some essential commodities, such as land and housing, but we are also aware that there are fewer employment opportunities in rural communities. The small size of local populations means that most people know each other and so human relations are often more important than professional ones. I know that a lot of people in my area are very aware of this fact and I like the sense of community that this creates.

What do you think are the main issues, challenges and opportunities for rural development in your part of Europe and area of expertise?

For the main issues, it seems to me that the question of 'rural culture' is a fundamental one. We regularly talk about biodiversity, and the need to protect our physical heritage, but I feel that we often forget about human heritage. My definition of this includes the traditional knowledge that local rural people bring with them. Sadly, I see this disappearing more and more every year and I think that rural life will lose its soul if, in the future, 'urban culture' continues to permeate rural societies. We need to protect the seeds of rural culture and conserve rural communities' human heritage, in the same way that we conserve our biodiversity habitats by supporting indigenous species.

In terms of your question about challenges, I think there is a need for everyone in rural areas to remain open to new ideas and be willing to consider the opinions or perspectives from all sorts of different people. There are many many different stakeholders that have a right to be heard in rural areas, such as local families, tourists, new inhabitants, politicians and others. All of these people need to respect each other's priorities and if we can achieve this we will be able to go forward in a far more equitable and effective manner.

The second main challenge for me links with this first concern and relates to rural communities' ability to sustain themselves in the long term through running viable economies and providing high quality of life for residents or visitors alike. Maintaining a strong and sustainable agricultural sector is essential for this in my area since our farming and forestry families provide a valuable backbone to rural community life.

Despite the increasingly competitive market place that they work in, our farmers and foresters continue to generate local employment and help provide the landscapes that attract visitor spending, while their families support both local services as well as traditional ways of rural life. These factors highlight the importance of addressing the challenges faced by our farmers and foresters.

As for rural development opportunities in our area, I would say that there are three key types. In no particular order of preference, my first type refers to environmental opportunities and these include both the presence of exploitable natural resources (like water, wood and wind) and those areas that are noted for their remarkable biodiversity or landscape, which can be a source of many valuable socio-economic rural developments.

Also, I think that cultural opportunities offer significant possibilities for rural development. In a world where 80% of the population lives in big cities, dominated by increasingly nondescript and globalised urban cultures, the rural world offers an interesting alternative of diverse differences that will continue to attract great interest, and associated expenditure, from this large and relatively affluent urban market. Cultivating our rural areas' cultural assets therefore seems to make a lot of commercial common sense to me.

Last but not least, the opportunity to 'think differently' is of major importance for our countryside. Today's rural world has the potential to be tomorrow's 'avant garde' where we can build a new model of society where people, nature and development can all co-exist within a successful and sustainable state. Nurturing such innovative thinking is therefore crucial to the future of rural areas.

What needs to be done, and by who, and how in order to address these challenges, and to take full advantage of the opportunities?

Concerning the challenge of openness, there is a big 'construction site' here which needs to be worked on by all rural stakeholders, including politicians and policy-makers, rural residents, businesses and service providers. I think that Europe has a role to play in this process and by providing incentives for cooperation, like through some of the EAFRD measures, this will help build greater good will and encourage positive approaches by key rural development partners.

Tackling the issue of maintaining long-term rural populations will require a flexible approach that avoids concentrating resources in restricted centres. Policies geared to the urban masses do not reflect many rural needs and special attention is required to ensure that rural development policy is able to match the characteristics of countryside areas.

I am aware that the EAFRD has been designed to do just this and for me I think it could be used wisely if it:

- succeeds in really involving local rural actors in the development and delivery of practical rural development support schemes and strategies
- secures priority status for rural businesses, especially small and medium-sized enterprises, located in areas identified as needing urgent sustainable development support
- encourages or facilitates more private sector investment in rural development projects
- allows both regional and national authorities to adopt appropriate approaches to implementing environmental regulations and business controls that achieve their overall aims through procedures that are tailored to rural circumstances, rather than rigid bureaucratic rule books.

What types of useful lessons have you learnt during your rural development work and what would be in your 'top three' pieces of advice to other practitioners?

In my experience an important point to remember in this sector is that rural development policy does not produce rural development actions on its own. Policies provide the framework but people need to implement them and so the policies should be people-focused.

By this I mean policies need to be relevant to the expectations of rural populations, be well publicised so that rural people know what type of development assistance is available, as well as why these types of action are being encouraged over and above others.

In addition, policies need to appreciate that small rural communities have a fixed amount of development energy. This energy has an infinite potential but it needs to be utilised in carefully controlled parcels in order to prevent it from being stretched too far at any one time, and thus becoming ineffective.

Finally, in terms of advice, I would simply say, always:

- spend as much time as possible listening to and speaking with rural communities in order to properly understand the reality and challenges faced by your clients. This will allow you to produce project and policy work that responds in the best practical ways to Europe's rural areas
- remain humble about your abilities as rural development practitioners
- evaluate the outcomes of rural development work with a philosophy that concentrates on benefits for rural communities and achieving good value for public money.



“...there is a need for everyone in rural areas to remain open to new ideas...”



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The CAP Health Check: addressing today's rural development challenges

The Health Check of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy builds on previous developments of financial support packages to EU farmers and Europe's countryside. It continues the complex and sometimes controversial process of shifting agricultural funds towards integrated rural development actions and has identified a clear set of priority challenges for today's rural development policy to address.

The EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) receives around €55 billion per year and this represents about 40% of the total current EU budget. The policy dates back to the 1960s when it was originally introduced to encourage agricultural production, assure availability of supplies at reasonable prices for European consumers and provide a fair standard of living for the farming community.

The CAP has generally been successful with respect to these original objectives. However, its success also produced unintended and temporary side-effects, such as surpluses of farm commodities, which consequently created distortions in world food markets.

CAP reforms

Situations similar to the above mentioned side-effects contributed to some fundamental CAP reforms towards the end of the last Century. Dairy quotas were introduced in the 1980s and 1992's 'MacSharry reforms' helped the CAP move toward a more free agricultural market. These reforms continued with the 'Agenda 2000' agreement that introduced policy innovations including: shifting farm subsidies away from price support, establishing direct payments, and the launch of a new integrated rural development policy, which has been become known as the CAP's second Pillar.

CAP terminology

CAP Pillars – the CAP consists of two main policy sections. The sections are called Pillars and referred to as the first Pillar and the second Pillar of the CAP. These are also known as Pillar 1 and Pillar 2. Each CAP Pillar contains its own set of policy actions.

Pillar 1 – contains mainstream farm subsidies and market support for agri-business sectors. The majority of Pillar 1 payments are financed directly from the central EU budget.

Pillar 2 – contains the EU's rural development policy. This includes support for activities that improve rural competitiveness, sustain environmental resources, enhance quality of life and diversify the economic bases in rural areas. Pillar 2 payments are normally co-financed by Member State's funds.

Direct payments – refer to CAP payments made directly to farmers under Pillar 1 in order to support their incomes. These compensate farmers for lower prices, following reductions in price support payments.

Price supports – are CAP instruments under Pillar 1 which increase agricultural commodity prices above the world market price.

Decoupling – is the process of removing links between farm subsidies and production of specific agricultural commodities, in order to give farmers more liberty regarding their choice of which agricultural products to produce.

Modulation – is the term for an internal CAP mechanism that transfers funds from direct payments under Pillar 1 to rural development measures in Pillar 2. It applies to the direct payments that farmers receive over and above the first € 5 000. Most of the new Member States are expected to apply modulation procedures from 2012.

Cross-compliance – is a CAP device that requires farmers to comply with standards concerning food safety, public health, animal health and welfare, plant health and environmental quality. Cross-compliance applies to all farmers that receive direct payments and if the rules are not respected, direct payments are reduced or cancelled.

Economic, and increasingly, social and environmental developments have influenced the evolution of the CAP over the decades. These developments have helped to create support policies that aim at enhancing farm sector competitiveness and promoting a market-oriented, environmentally sustainable agriculture, as well as strengthening integrated rural development approaches.

The cornerstone of recent reforms has been: a reduction of price support, an increase in direct income support of farming households and a decoupling of farm subsidies from production

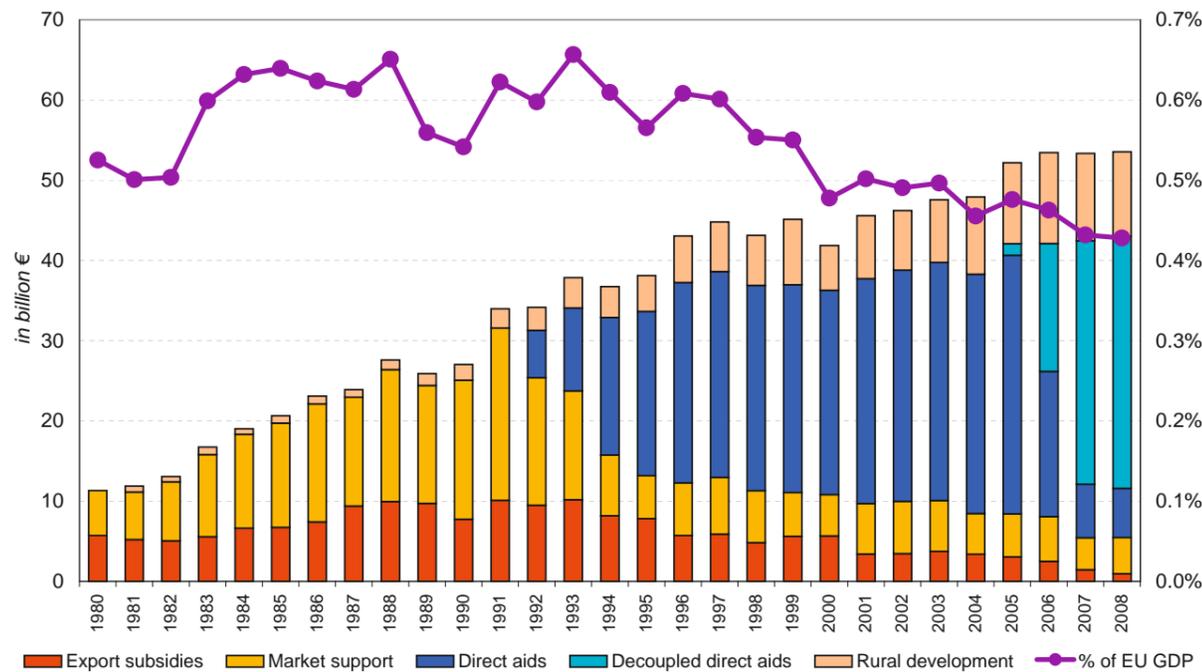
activities. These policy approaches allow market forces to play a greater role in EU farming and minimise, or even eliminate in the long term, any market and trade distorting effects.

In parallel to this paradigm shift, Pillar 2 of the CAP has gradually gained more importance, enlarging the scope of the CAP through the integration of rural development measures. Figure 1 illustrates the shifts in CAP priorities between 1980 and 2008.

Figure 1 provides a timeline of the CAP reform process and in 2007 the

European Commission adopted its most recent review of CAP spending in its Communication titled: 'Preparing the Health Check of the CAP reform'. This Health Check was tasked with aims to explore the need for any policy updates that could help simplify CAP, enhance its ability to grasp new market opportunities, and prepare it for facing new challenges, such as climate change, water management and bio-energy.

Figure 1: The path of CAP expenditure, 1980-2008 (bio € and in % of EU GDP)



CAP Health Check

The European Commission's stated aim of the Health Check in its Communication was... "not to re-invent or re-reform the Common Agricultural Policy, but to assess if it is working as well as it could in a larger European Union and in a shifting international context. The Health Check is therefore not a major reform but an effort to streamline and to modernise the CAP."

During the run-up to the Health Check agreement, Commissioner Fischer Boel talked about the main streamlining and modernisation goals as being:

- the ability of European agriculture to respond robustly to market signals, especially when those signals are telling us that the world needs more food
- the need to provide the right kind of support for farmers, so that crises do not turn into disasters for our agricultural production base
- furthering appropriate responses to a number of crucial developing challenges such as climate change.

These comments reinforced the impression that the Health Check was not a preparation for a total makeover of the CAP but a process that was more aimed at fine-tuning and adjusting of existing approaches. The process provided an opportunity to reflect on previous reforms and a large amount of consultation was carried out by the European Commission. Findings from the consultation showed that views and expectations about the CAP varied widely, both between and within Member States' rural stakeholders.

Many farmers' organisations presented strong arguments to limit dramatic or large changes and these vocal voices were echoed by Member States such as France and Germany. There were also requests for simplified bureaucratic rules regarding cross-compliance procedures and a concern that full decoupling might lead to land abandonment, resulting in complete disappearance of production in certain regions.

Environmental lobby groups argued with equal passion for a transfer of CAP funds from farm production towards environmental protection and production of public goods, via Pillar 2's European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). Organisations with more general rural development roles were also keen for larger changes of the CAP.

Health Check agreement

On 20 November 2008 the EU agriculture ministers reached a political agreement on the Health Check of the CAP. Outcomes from the agreement have established key amendments in relation to EU rural development policy which include, *inter alia*:

- increasing the proportion of modulation from Pillar 1 to Pillar 2
- using the modulated funds to address priority policy issues that have been termed as the 'new challenges' and concern climate change, renewable energy, water management, biodiversity (including support for innovation) and dairy restructuring.



A further challenge regarding access to broadband Internet in rural areas, was added by the EU's European Economic Recovery Plan in March 2009 and the combination of this and other policy amendments will have a marked effect on EAFRD activities. In particular, the increased modulation will result in new resources for the EAFRD axes in Pillar 2 and an additional €1.5 billion has been provided for the EAFRD from the Recovery Plan for support to both broadband infrastructure and work based on addressing the new challenges.

EAFRD benefits

Each of the four EAFRD axes is able to receive support from the additional funds that will be allocated to Pillar 2 via modulation. Decisions about exactly how the extra money will be distributed between the different axes and their various rural development measures remains a national responsibility that Member States are now tasked to action.

All rural stakeholders recognise that there will be a need for large investments in farms and forests to help address the new challenges. Axis 1 provides some of these investment measures, as well as a higher investment subsidy for young farmers and a special transitional support measure for 'Agricultural holdings undergoing restructuring'.

The indicative list of types of operation, suggested by the Commission, regarding possible axis 1 measures in which new modulated funds could be used are:

- improved efficiency of nitrogen fertiliser use (e.g. through reduced use, dedicated equipment or precision agriculture) and improvement of manure storage
- improvement of energy efficiency (e.g. through use of construction materials which reduce heat loss)
- preventive mechanisms against adverse effects of climate-related extreme events (e.g. setting up of hail nets)
- flood prevention and management measures (e.g. projects related to coastal and interior flood protection)
- training or use of farm advisory services in relation to the new challenges.

Axis 2 is seen as the main recipient of additional EAFRD allocations targeting climate change, water management and biodiversity. Nevertheless the operations highlighted above for axis 1 demonstrate that these challenges can be best addressed by a combination of cross-cutting and horizontal rural development approaches.

The Commission suggests that modulated funds are well suited to the following axis 2 operations:

- soil management practices – e.g. using appropriate tillage methods, growing catch crops or diversified crop rotations
- improved efficiency of nitrogen fertiliser use
- land use change – e.g. establishment of permanent set-aside
- extensification of livestock – e.g. reduction of stocking density – and grassland management
- afforestation or establishment of agro-forestry systems
- conversion to more resistant forest stand types
- preventative actions against forest fires and climate-related natural disasters.

In terms of axis 3, it remains difficult to predict the extent to which quality of life and economic diversification measures will receive new funds from the modulation process. Nevertheless, a number of axis 3 interventions could be envisaged that make positive contributions towards climate change mitigation, renewable energy use and sustainable management of water or biodiversity resources.

For example, training will be useful in relation to building capacity to tackle the main challenges and upgrading of rural infrastructure can involve improving energy efficiency, as well as reducing pollution risks. Green tourism offers biodiversity benefits and innovative approaches to addressing the new challenges may also present other economic diversification opportunities.

The Leader axis is not specifically mentioned in the indicative list from the Commission regarding measures that will contribute to addressing climate change, renewable energy, water quality and biodiversity. However, Local Action Groups (LAGs) are encouraged to develop collaborative approaches between public, private and voluntary sector groups and individuals that tackle the four main challenges. These types of action can draw on the additional funds.

LAGs are also well placed to test innovative approaches that demonstrate valuable links between the main challenges and primary production systems, or with food industry chains. Particularly novel

approaches will be able to draw on previous Leader experiences in gaining synergies from cooperation at regional and international levels.

Health Check conclusions

The CAP Health Check has now been adopted and is no longer a policy proposal. The agreement has proved that it is not a preparation for larger or new reforms of the CAP, but is more of an update of the 2003 reforms.

Many expectations were raised during the Health Check discussions and the final agreement appears to be a sound compromise. The agreement may not be what some stakeholders had hoped for but it was certainly not as bad as others had feared.

Political realities have been recognised and the main effect of the Health Check for EU rural development stakeholders is the focus on fundamental issues that need to be addressed now, rather than in the future when they will be even more difficult to tackle. Adverse climate change

effects, health hazards caused by poor water quality, society's unsustainable reliance on fossil fuels and loss of valuable biodiversity are all increasing problems that affect an increasing number of people, and that need increasingly urgent responses.

2008's CAP Health Check agreement provides additional options and opportunities from the EU's largest budget that will help EU rural development to make positive contributions to tackling these EU-wide issues. Additional actions across all four EAFRD axes will also help to further support the sustainability and economic growth of Europe's rural areas.

The key challenge now lies with the Member States who need to apply these new rural development resources in the most visionary and wise manners that successfully meet the growing and pressing needs of their present, and future, populations.

CAP Health Check outcomes agreed in November 2008 included, *inter alia*:

- modulation rates will rise in four steps until 2013, resulting in a total modulation level of 10%
- the new challenges to be tackled by the increased modulated funds are climate change, renewable energies, management of water and biodiversity
- innovation linked to these main challenges will be assisted where links to primary production or to the food industry can be demonstrated
- young farmers will be eligible for higher investment limits
- decoupling of direct income support payments to farmers will continue to cut the link between these payments and production. Most payments will be fully decoupled by 2013
- public intervention buying will be scaled down so that it can be used as a safety net for real crises, rather than a regular influence on the market
- milk production quotas will increase up until 2013, in order to help the sector prepare for when the quota system ends in 2015
- dairy accompanying measures, such as special investment subsidies, will be available
- a special EAFRD measure will be created to support development for 'Agricultural holdings undergoing restructuring'
- any unused Pillar 1 funds can be transferred to Pillar 2 at the Member States' discretion.



EU enlargement: Europe's new rural map

EU enlargement has created many new opportunities and challenges for European rural development policy, which now covers a much wider territory and supports a significantly larger population than ever before.

Enlargement of the EU represents a historic achievement, and one that continues today. The entry of 10 new Member States in 2004, and subsequently of Bulgaria and Romania in 2007, marked important junctures for the EU's development.

Inclusion of these 12 additional Member States expanded the EU market place by over 106 million new consumers, extended the amount of Utilised Agricultural Area by 44%, and the EU now has over 9 million more people working in agriculture than it did in 2003.

Implementing a common rural development policy across this new EU rural map presents numerous challenges, but equally offers possibly a greater number of interesting opportunities.

Meeting rural needs

One of the early challenges for policy-makers involved developing a common support structure that was capable of meeting the specific rural development needs in new Member States, but which was also relevant to older members of the EU. The solution came in the flexible nature of the European Agriculture Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). This provides a strategic framework, within which Member States may select from a menu of different development measures according to their national and regional needs.

Because new Member States have a different history, their rural areas tend to have relatively high development needs and this is recognised by the high levels of EAFRD allocations in their Rural Development Programmes (RDPs).

These funds are targeting acute development problems linked to: the lack of basic infrastructure, the need to make significant investment in order to comply with newly introduced EU standards, the lack of amenities and services in rural areas, and the lack of diversification in rural economies. Other challenges relate to: the existence of extensive traditional farming techniques and landscapes, and the EU requirements

for sustainable management of the countries' rich biodiversity. All of these rural development issues tend to be more pronounced in the new Member States than elsewhere in the EU.

RDP funds provide assistance to tackle such issues and the RDPs themselves represent the first fully integrated set of rural development policy actions to exist in most of the new Member States. The introduction of this innovative strategic support framework for rural areas is one of the major non-financial benefits that EU rural development policy provides following EU membership.

Particular attention was paid during the design of the current EU rural development policy to ensure that the EAFRD measures would have sufficient scope to address the aforementioned development needs of rural areas in new Member States. Specific RDP instruments were made available including: transitional measures in the form of measures supporting semi-subsistence farms undergoing restructuring, and the establishment of producer groups. Romania and Bulgaria also receive special provisions for advisory and extension services to farmers, as well as enhanced capacity-building assistance with the Leader axis.

Young farmers

In addition, the RDPs help with other crucial needs in the new Member States, such as support for young farmers. This type of rural development assistance had not generally been available before in these countries. The new RDP funds for young farmers provide an important boost to help them set up in business for the first time, and overcome some of the financial barriers associated with taking over a farm.

Such EU support also helps to promote agriculture and other rural activities as attractive career options for young people. This is becoming increasingly necessary because the mass out-migration of younger generations since 2004 continues to present very real problems for the long-term viability of

many rural populations. Axis 3 of the RDPs can also help address these issues by improving quality of life and facilitating economic diversification.

Furthermore, opportunities from axis 2 of the RDPs exist in the form of natural resource management and these will help to improve the overall sustainability of rural areas. The creation of employment opportunities from valuing non-market goods (and providing support for their provision or maintenance) is also relatively innovative for most of the new Member States and these have largely been introduced due to the availability of funding associated with EU accession.

Challenges and opportunities

Despite the challenges faced by rural areas in new Member States, prospects are positive. The full suite of RDP measures available from all four EAFRD axes provides potential access to a wide variety of new rural development opportunities. These should in turn create many knock-on benefits for rural populations.

The flexibility and scope of the RDPs provide rural policy-makers and practitioners with a useful toolkit to tackle development and deprivation issues in a coherent manner.

Hence, EU accession has not only brought access to new financial benefits but it has also provided access to critically important strategic support at policy level for rural areas. Such support may well turn out to be the biggest long-term rural development benefit from EU membership.



Subsistence and semi-subsistence farming: a priority for EU rural development policy

Nearly half of all farms in today's EU are operating at or near subsistence level, and up to a further quarter at semi-subsistence level. These significant sectors of the rural economy require dedicated support to help to build on their strengths and to drive sustainable development in EU rural areas.

EU farm size measurements

- **Farm size** – is a Eurostat figure used for defining the physical size of farm holdings. These show the agricultural area used by the holding, but exclude any share that the farms may have in use of common land.
- **UAA** – refers to 'Utilised Agricultural Area' and is defined as that part of a land holding that can be used for productive crops or livestock.
- **ESU** – refers to a 'European Size Unit'. These are used as a measure of the economic size of a farm business. ESUs do not relate to the physical area covered by the farm – they are based on the total amount of commodities that each farm produces. Standard gross margins (SGMs) are calculated for individual commodities and the farm's total SGM is the sum of the SGMs for each individual commodity. SGMs are measured in euros and the total value of SGMs is used to express a farm's economic size. 1 ESU = 1 200 SGM (or €1 200).

T. HUDSON

In simple terms, a subsistence farm is one that produces food mainly to feed the farm family, with very limited surplus (if any) for sale or for barter. A semi-subsistence farm is one which produces enough surplus, beyond the family's own needs, to sell for regular income.

Policy intervention under the EU Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) is different for the two categories. For

this reason, the difference between the two categories needs to be defined in a measurable way. In broad terms, subsistence farms are usually defined as those of less than one European Size Unit (ESU). In some countries this is taken to be the equivalent of 1 ha of Utilised Agricultural Area (UAA). The definition of semi-subsistence farms varies from country to country, within a range between 1 and 8 ESUs.

A significant sector

Eurostat data covering all 27 EU Member States showed that in 2005 the countries had a total of 14.4 million farms. Of these, 6.7 million holdings were at subsistence level (less than one ESU). A further 3.6 million were of less than 5 ha in size, which would mean that large numbers of them were in the semi-subsistence category, as defined above.

The same Eurostat figures show that subsistence holdings are commonly found in all EU countries except Denmark and the Netherlands. In the EU-15 countries, they totalled 940 000, which represented under 17% of all farms, but in the EU-12 they totalled 5.7 million, which represents over 65% of all farms. Most of the subsistence farms are found in eastern Member States, notably Romania, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria and Lithuania. Nevertheless, their numbers

are also high in southern Member States such as Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal. Romania had the most subsistence farms, with 3 million. Poland had 1.4 million, Hungary 557 000, Bulgaria 416 000 and Italy 348 000.

As for semi-subsistence farms, the EU statistics do not use this term. But figures for farms under 5 ha in size suggest that significant numbers of such size farms are found in Italy (923 000), Romania (850 000),

Greece (480 000), Spain (457 000), Poland (357 000), France (108 000) and Bulgaria (95 000). Every other EU country also has some farms of this size.

Trends in the Eurostat data for farms of under 5 ha in size reveals that their numbers have steadily declined over recent years in most Member States, other than Cyprus, Malta, Poland and Slovenia.

This decline may be explained in part by farm amalgamations, and by some holdings being transformed into competitive players on the market. But the overall numbers of subsistence and semi-subsistence farms in the EU are still very great. They present a formidable case for rural development support since:

- they are the homes of about 10 million households, who form a large part of the rural communities in many of the host regions
- they offer a sole or primary source of livelihood to these families
- these small farmers manage significant areas of land (for example, 63% of Romanian UAA)
- they contribute to food supplies and to local and national economies. Some of this contribution falls within the informal economy but informal food supplies can sustain not only the farm families but also their neighbours and their extended families, including those who have moved to the cities
- their low environmental impact characteristics help to sustain landscapes and biodiversity habitats with High Nature Values.

Those who live on subsistence and semi-subsistence farms should therefore be seen not only as farmers (or at least as food producers), and as actual or potential entrepreneurs, but also as important managers of EU land and as rural citizens whose quality of life is a motive for rural development.

Key challenges

The continuing fall in the number of small farms reveals a key challenge. The way of life on small farms has been a tradition for many generations, but now more and more younger members of farm families are looking outwards to the cities, or even to other countries, for their education, jobs and future prospects.

The older generations remain and in Romania, for example, over 40 % of farmers are aged 65 or over. Out-

migration weakens the rural communities and can cause a vicious cycle whereby reduced population leads to loss of services, which can further weaken local economies and rural communities. Moreover, the loss of economic and social vitality may also cause farming activity to cease, threatening maintenance of high environmental quality in some areas.

Reversing this cycle of decline will depend upon actions to: improve the economy of farms, add value to farm products, promote diversified sources of income, such as tourism or other service provisions, address low levels of education, improve access to modern buildings and infrastructure, such as water or electricity supplies, provide appropriate credit for small entrepreneurs, and minimise distances from markets. All these actions lie within the scope of rural development policy support.

Policy responses

The aforementioned challenges require a sensitively planned and coordinated social, environmental and economic response. Policy responses also need to be tailored to specific circumstances, because the development needs of semi-subsistence and subsistence farmers can vary widely across the EU.

For example, RDP support for semi-subsistence and subsistence farmers in some Member States is influenced by lifestyle factors, particularly when small-sized holdings exist as 'hobby farms'. This is often more common in Member States with relatively high GDPs. In these cases, no special policy responses are generally required to redress rural deprivation issues, since the decision to carry out smaller-sized farming is frequently based on choice and reflects the outcome of an affluent society.

Even in less affluent countries, many people maintain a subsistence holding as a choice, not a necessity. But the case is different, and the need for relevant responses from rural development policy much more serious, where elderly or unskilled rural residents have no choice

other than to live at subsistence or semi-subsistence level, which may even be in extreme poverty.

Tackling these concerns is not always straightforward and inherent obstacles can hinder the ability of subsistence farmers to break out of rural poverty traps. This is illustrated by the reality that subsistence farms are generally excluded from most of the RDP assistance that is provided under axis 1 of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). This type of EAFRD support tends to target farms that are producing goods for the market, rather than for the farm family.

In some cases Member States' RDPs do use EAFRD resources from axis 1 to direct support towards improving the output levels of subsistence farms. This aims to help develop the subsistence farmers' economic potential.

Semi-subsistence farms, by contrast, are normally eligible to access more types of EAFRD support under axis 1 and this can provide considerable assistance to help them enter the market on a more professional basis. For example, a dedicated axis 1 measure is available for those semi-subsistence farms in the new Member States which are undergoing restructuring.

This semi-subsistence sector is likely to experience some quite large changes. A divergence is already underway between those which invest, restructure and develop into commercially viable holdings, and those which either retrench to become subsistence holdings, or leave farming completely when holdings are likely to be amalgamated to form larger units.

Integrated solutions

No 'instant fix' is available to address the rural development needs of Europe's semi-subsistence and subsistence farmers. Nevertheless, in those areas which have significant numbers of small farmers, the RDP managers are aware of the importance of applying an integrated approach to rural development.

Here, the flexible use of measures under all four axes of the EAFRD can help the survival of traditional farming communities. In this way, some farms can be supported to become competitive, while others can be enabled to develop alternative sources of income, and the communities generally are helped to improve their quality of life.

The following case studies provide useful examples of how different types of integrated policy approach can successfully support rural development actions for subsistence and semi-subsistence farms.



Integrated local development of a small-farming community in Romania

Târnava Mare is a community of small-scale farmers in the uplands of Eastern Transylvania supporting around 23 000 rural residents. The future sustainability of this community, and the High Nature Value environment that these farmers have created, are now threatened as younger generations continue to leave the villages for a better life elsewhere.

In 2005 a district rural development programme was launched by local communities with social, economic and environmental aims to regenerate the area and conserve the natural resource base. This ADEPT initiative is a not-for-profit organisation and charity promoting Agricultural Development and Environmental Protection. The initiative produced a community-led rural action plan that included raising funds from international charities and sponsorship from the Romanian private sector.

With these funds, it launched an integrated programme of local development activities that have now helped to improve quality of life, increase farm competitiveness and generate non-agricultural sources of income while protecting and valuing biodiversity. These goals have been achieved by the following types of project work that remain relevant for other small farming areas around the EU:

- agri-environment agreements with over 200 small farmers, focused on sustained management of High Nature Value grasslands. This has led to a high take-up of the government's own agri-environment measures, with 80% of farmers in the area signed up



J. POWELL

- creation of a Local Action Group (LAG), using the Leader model, which is a candidate for future axis 4 funds operational in the area
- support for small-scale processing of food and other farm products, including solar-powered dryers for fruit and vegetables
- organising a regular weekly farmers' market in Bucharest for local traditional products from Târnava Mare
- training courses for local people in food hygiene and agro-tourism
- creation of a local Visitor Information Centre
- production of guidebooks and a local walking map for visitors
- production of a community newspaper, valued by local people
- production and wide distribution among small farmers and small producers throughout Romania, of a booklet explaining the hygiene and other conditions that they must comply with following Romania's entry into the EU, and the support that is available to them.

ADEPT has been working closely with the Ministry of Agriculture, and hopes that its continuing integrated rural development actions will be assisted by new EAFRD resources.



Collaborative approaches to cheese production in Slovenia

North-western Slovenia's Julian Alps support a long tradition of small-scale farming based around 'transhumance' livestock husbandry. This involves summer grazing of cattle on mountain pastures when milk products are converted into a hard 'Tolmin' cheese.

The closure of Communist collective farms after independence in 1991 led to some new pasture owners rejecting the old practices but cheeses are still being made on the hills by a small number of producers. Six of these transhumance farmers

have worked together to fence off 50 ha of hill grazing land above the village of Kin, where they keep a herd of milking cows plus calves.

Their collaborative actions have helped raise sufficient funds to build a new milking shed, using traditional and landscape-sensitive design methods, as well a new building for cheese-making. National authorities took account of the small farmers' circumstances and adapted hygiene regulations to provide safe standards using alternative approaches than those that are more relevant for larger food factories.

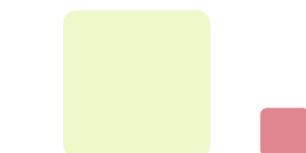
Additional employment has been created and the farmers hired a skilled worker, assisted part-time by his family, to milk the cows and make the cheese. Further rural development outcomes from the Tolmin cheese producer group include the effective marketing approaches that have been applied using support from the Severna Primorska LAG.

Branding is now an active part of the small farmers' business philosophy and their cheeses are promoted to both national and international buyers as high-quality, environmentally friendly, traditional, local, safe and natural products.

The integrated approach demonstrated here in Slovenia shows how small-scale farmer's socio-economic needs were balanced with environmental considerations to produce 'win-win' results for the local community.



M. DOWER



Supplementary employment for Ireland's small farmers

A significant proportion of small farmers in Ireland earn incomes so low that they merit government social security support. These farmers tend to have spare time for other work and these two ideas were brought together within an innovative Irish government rural employment scheme.

This 'Rural Social Scheme' provides income support for Ireland's large numbers of small-scale farmers, in return for them doing work which will benefit rural communities. The programme is overseen by a State Ministry and managed by Leader LAGs, which work in partnership with public sector municipalities and other local bodies to determine the work carried out by the farmers.

Employment created includes social and environmental work such as:

- care of older people
- community care for children in pre- and after-school groups
- energy conservation work for older people and those at risk of poverty
- village and countryside enhancement projects
- maintaining and improving walking routes used by visitors to the countryside



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- maintenance and care-taking of community and sporting facilities
- projects relating to not-for-profit cultural and heritage centres.

The scheme provides participants with part-time work of around 19.5 hours per week for a year. Working hours are adapted to fit with farming tasks and each 12-month period can be extended if participants want to continue in the scheme. Wage rates are set according to a national standard, with supplements available for those who have dependants in their family. Where the farmer is unable to work, their spouse may apply to work on the scheme.

This nationwide scheme brings multiple social, economic and environmental benefits. It provides an excellent example of how LAGs and other rural development groups can deliver government programmes wider than those co-funded through the EAFRD. The scheme has been proven to work well in practice since 2004 and it offers good demonstration value for other EU rural communities where under-employment represents a growing concern for small scale, subsistence or semi-subsistence farmers.



M. DOWER

Using village resources in Turkey

Turkey's accession to the EU would significantly increase the numbers of small and subsistence farmers operating within the EU. Rural trends in Turkish regions reflect those in other accession countries, with depopulation posing problems for village viability and sustainable growth.

Take the example of the village of Bogatepe, located at an altitude of 2 200 metres on the high plateau of Kars province in north-eastern Turkey. The main products here are milk, cheese and calves, which go for fattening at a neighbouring village further down the mountain. Geese are also raised, usually by the community's women.

This community of Kurds and Caucasian people has a population of about 1 000 in summer, when cows are out on the hill, but only 500 in winter, when the cows are indoors and many villagers migrate to towns and cities.

Over the last few years, Bogatepe's community has been working with SÜRKAL, a Turkish non-profit organisation, and the Kapkas University in Kars to upgrade village

facilities and diversify the economy, using funds donated by the company which is building the Baku-Tbilisi pipeline through this region.

This support has helped villagers to make the most of their own resource base and led to a useful collection of new integrated rural development projects that are helping to sustain the future of small-scale farms.

New projects include: a barn conversion into a cheese-making plant, which meets EU standards; a new grain dryer has been created by the voluntary efforts of three sons from the village who are studying engineering in Istanbul; the women of the village have created a new enterprise in growing, drying and selling medicinal and culinary herbs; and a new community hall to provide a focus for local identity and services.

Rural research: an essential partner for EU rural development policy

EU rural development policy is tasked to support the European Council's strategy objectives and help make the EU the most competitive, sustainable and knowledge-based economy in the world. Rural researchers from across Europe are already making good headway in achieving these goals.

EU rural development policy aspires to stimulate and support satisfactory progress towards sustainable growth and prosperity among rural populations. These high-level goals cannot be accomplished in isolation and require accurate, up-to-date knowledge about key factors such as: rural dynamics, policy impacts on competitiveness and the well-being of rural areas, optimal institutional arrangements for policy delivery, sustainable land-use systems and many more influential aspects of EU rural life.

Such knowledge must be both multi-disciplinary and transnational in its constituents, and the European Commission has played a major role in sponsoring rural development research that complies with these requirements.

Improving rural knowledge bases

Many important advances in rural life have stemmed from the results of rural research studies. These include the quantum leaps in agri-science and agri-engineering, as well as the identification of crucial environmental protection issues and exploration of solutions for an assortment of rural sociological concerns.

Policy research has also made major positive impacts on EU rural areas and the European Commission's Research Directorate-General has undertaken impact assessments to identify research outcomes which delivered significant policy benefits. Among those focusing specifically on rural development, one of the highest impact scores was awarded to the Dynamics of Rural Areas (DORA) project which identified a range of core success factors for rural areas.

Results from the DORA research led to a set of recommendations that heavily influenced the design of today's EU rural development policy. DORA's transnational researchers from Germany, Greece, Sweden and the UK identified factors that reflect many of the strategic approaches adopted by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). Notable

among DORA conclusions were: the need for increased flexibility at national and regional levels, the efficiency gains possible by separating rural development actions from mainstream agricultural policy, and the additional rural benefits generated by broadening the scope of policy actions beyond economic growth and development.

25 years of rural support

These types of outcome demonstrate the relevance of rural research and the EU has now been funding similar research and technological developments since 1984. Much of this rural research has been delivered through successive multi-annual Framework Programmes (FP). Financial support has steadily increased over the 25 years and rural development has benefitted from each FP via a variety of different areas.

During the 1994 to 1998 FP4 period, a specific 'Agriculture and Fisheries' programme (FAIR) was launched. FAIR included a sub area for rural development which funded 14 useful projects. In FP5, rural development issues were included under Key Action 5 'Quality of Life', which saw the total number of rural development projects climb to 73.

Support for rural development research was available under multiple areas in FP6 and some 48 projects received funding, mainly under the thematic areas of 'Sustainable Development' and 'Development of Policies'. Overall from 1994 to 2006, more than €180 million were spent on projects that help improve the scientific bases for EU rural development actions.

FP7 rural research

The EU's current commitment to develop a European Research Area has been translated into increased budget allocations for present day research. FP7 support for the research period between 2007 and 2013 now totals over €53 billion.

Rural development research can be funded under two priority areas within

the FP7 budget. These are 'Food, Agriculture and Fisheries, Biotechnology' (KKBE) and 'Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities' (SSH). Both areas have been allocated budgets of approximately €2.6 billion. Much of this research budget remains available and although some proposals have been approved a vast rural research resource remains open for economic, social and environmental scientists from around the EU to use for the benefit of rural areas.

Although still in its infancy, FP7 is already supporting research into important rural development issues. Two projects examining the future of rural areas started in 2008 under the SSH priority area. The aim of these projects is to improve understanding about how agricultural policy impacts on changes in rural areas (see www.cap-ire.eu for more information). Findings from the research will be used to improve the targeting of rural development schemes that support multi-functional goods and services (see www.rufus-eu.de for more information). A third FP7 rural research initiative will soon begin working on methods to help EU rural areas deal with globalisation.

Rural research in action

EU rural development policy continues to face a challenging operating environment as societal demands shift and the nature of rural areas change. Rural research plays a pivotal role in supporting informed policy decisions and this is evidenced in the selection of case studies on recent rural research projects that are featured in the following pages.

Climate change research: reducing greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture

Climate change represents one of the main challenges for the EU and this has been confirmed during the recent Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) Health Check. Agriculture is the main source of two important greenhouse gases – nitrous oxide and methane – and thus contributes considerably to climate change. Reducing the levels of these greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture is recognised as an objective for EU rural development policy and an FP6 research project has examined farming practices that have the potential to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

This PICCMAT (Policy Incentives for Climate Change Mitigation Agricultural Techniques) project has now completed its work which focused on achieving three main objectives:

- to provide scientific data that could be used to inform the development of policy related to agricultural practices and climate change mitigation
- to reinforce links between policy-makers and scientists in the field of climate change and agriculture

- to raise awareness among European farmers about the impact of agriculture on climate change.

PICCMAT was managed by an international consortium of research and consulting organisations from Belgium, Scotland, Denmark, the Netherlands, Italy, Spain, Poland, Bulgaria and Germany.

The work programme operated over two years and included an in-depth review of existing knowledge about agricultural practices linked to climate change mitigation. The feasibility and efficiency of different methods was examined for a range of possible changes to land management techniques.

Mitigation methods which indicated good potential were then tested by field consultations on case-study sites in different European agricultural regions. Data from the case-study research was used to investigate obstacles and issues involved in the possible mainstreaming of these farming practices. This provided analysis of farm-level practices for climate change mitigation in agriculture and a quantification of their mitigation potential across Europe.

Research results

Results from the field research were widely disseminated and discussed during consultations with farmers, environmental organisations and policy-makers from EU and national levels. These consultations helped the project partners to develop a set of 'PICCMAT practices' and a suite of PICCMAT policy recommendations.

The menu of 'PICCMAT practices' covers many different types of agricultural activity for different regions of the EU. It has been carefully designed to acknowledge the need to tailor policy measures for agricultural climate change mitigation to regional circumstances. The menu defines different agricultural methods and provides management information about their mitigation potential, cost and feasibility of implementation, co-benefits and trade-offs.

Activities that have been considered within the PICCMAT practices include: growing catch crops, reduced tillage, residue management, extensification, rotation of species, optimising manure storage, establishing grass in orchards

and vineyards, agro-forestry, optimising grazing intensity and organic soil restoration.

In addition to guidance on technical climate change mitigation actions, the research project also developed policy recommendations. The recommendations include suggestions to assess existing CAP instruments in order to see whether they support or hamper climate change mitigation. Other ideas relate to improving the implementation of existing environmental policies (in particular the EU Directives regarding Habitats and Nitrates). A need is seen to increase knowledge and capacity about mitigation through agricultural techniques and testing different approaches. A further suggestion made was to use appropriate labelling to address consumption habits.

These and other recommendations were discussed at the PICCMAT symposium in Brussels, where delegates agreed that there is sufficient knowledge to move towards increased practical implementation of mitigation measures. It was considered important to begin by implementing 'no regret' measures



that do not cause extra costs but bring multiple benefits.

Action by farmers was thought to require stimulation through enhanced information and cooperation. Major changes in agricultural systems, for instance in Eastern Europe, were noted as providing an opportunity to integrate innovative and climate-friendly techniques at an early stage.

The large climate impact of meat production was acknowledged and the importance of consumption patterns was stressed. International accounting systems for agricultural greenhouse gas emissions were also highlighted as needing to be reformed and better reflect mitigation action.

The full set of PICCMAT recommendations can be downloaded from

http://www.climatechangeintelligence.baastel.be/piccmat/files/PICCMAT_policy_recommendations_final_071008.pdf



Tourism training research: piloting innovative learning techniques for rural tourism businesses

Tourism is a major source of income in many rural areas across the EU. The quantity and quality of tourism products offered to rural visitors continues to grow and this has many effects on competition within the sector. Skills training represents an essential ingredient in ensuring that tourism providers are able to face important challenges relating to economic growth, employment and sustainability in the future.

Understanding the skills and training requirements of tourism businesses is therefore an important requirement for rural development support policies. An EU transnational project has been undertaking applied research in this area to help identify methodologies for plugging skill gaps in rural tourism sectors.

Funded by the European Commission's Leonardo da Vinci Programme, the Forestur project operated for two years and concluded in October 2008. It was implemented by a partnership of nine institutions supporting rural businesses in Hungary, Italy, Romania and Spain.

A core aim of the Forestur partnership was to pilot new approaches to tourism skills

training in different rural areas. Results from the pilot research would be used to identify success factors and generic approaches that could be transferred to a variety of different rural development circumstances.

Needs analysis

A wide variety of different rural tourism professionals were included in the pilot project and the outcomes are intended to be adaptable for staff from tourism businesses, tourism associations and rural development agencies.

An in-depth analysis of training needs was carried out during the early part of the project to define specific requirements in each participating country and this produced information about 102 rural tourism professionals (28 in Hungary, 22 in Italy, 26 in Romania, and 26 in Spain).

The analysis not only examined technical skill demands but also investigated factors affecting trainees' ability to participate in lifelong learning programmes. Research findings confirmed the fact that many small-scale tourism businesses did not feel the need to undertake training. A number

of rural businesses were not aware of the commercial benefits from upgrading skills and staff found it hard to find time to combine work and training.

Attendance was therefore considered a potential problem and the project team needed to identify an approach that avoided possible isolation, or a lack of support, which could cause trainees to drop out of the skills programme.

A hybrid solution was proposed which combined face-to-face classroom sessions with online distance learning support. Innovative training methodologies were also piloted that aimed to maintain trainee motivation and facilitate effective development of new skills.

Training topics were identified based on the needs analysis and these concentrated on increasing ICT use in rural tourism businesses. Special attention was paid to building ICT capacity in agri-tourism businesses and this included use of ICT for bookings, promotion, marketing, service design and recreational activities. These were all recognised as helping improve visitor numbers and extend the length of stays.

Learning techniques

The main learning methodology was based on a new technique for the rural tourism sector. It adapted the 'Fenicia' vocational training model, which was originally developed by another Leonardo da Vinci Project supporting small retail companies.

Forestur's applied research work set out to test the suitability of 'Fenicia' techniques for the rural tourism sector. The methodology was chosen since it offers opportunities to facilitate access to vocational training for people with difficulties in attending traditional courses. It takes a participative and motivating approach that can be characterised using the metaphor of a conversation. Training is implemented via a learning conversation, which takes place over weeks or months. The role of the teacher is to facilitate and guide this conversation, and stimulate it using activities designed to help trainees learn by giving them the opportunity to explore concepts together.

Piloting this approach aimed to achieve commitment and engagement of the



trainees in the learning process, since the 'conversation' that takes place forces the trainee to articulate what they are learning and thus structure it visibly. Apart from the obvious advantages for the learning process itself, which becomes more active, these activities also assist teachers to intervene and thus improve the learning process.

Outcomes

Findings from the pilot work have confirmed the relevance and effectiveness of the Forestur project's training methodology's for tourism professionals in remote areas. The applied research and tailor-made training courses succeeded in developing knowledge, skills and competences of rural tourism businesses.

The approach provides operators in the rural tourism sector with the possibility of accessing continuous training and information. The techniques tested during the Forestur project also have good demonstration value for local and regional authorities involved in promoting lifelong learning for rural tourism businesses.

Further information about the project is available on www.forestur.net.



Bioenergy research: identifying policy options to boost the potential of bioenergy as a rural development tool

Bioenergy offers many interesting sustainable rural development opportunities and a recent FP6 research project has been investigating the effects of EU bioenergy policies on rural areas and agriculture policies.

Titled AGRINERGY, the research project ran between May 2007 and October 2008. It was managed by a partnership of specialist research institutes from Germany, Belgium, The Netherlands, Poland and France.

The research partners were aware that the EU had set ambitious targets to increase the share of renewable energy sources in gross inland energy consumption. 20% of the EU's gross final energy consumption is required to be provided by renewable energies by 2020. For the transport sector in particular, a national 10% renewable

energy target by 2020 has been set for each Member State.

Biomass-based fuels are considered important for the achievement of these targets. They are well suited for electricity generation, heating, cooling and fuels for transport.

AGRINERGY researchers were keen to identify the best way to help agriculture and forestry make key contributions to increasing levels of renewable bioenergy in Europe. Achieving the maximum energy gains and additional income for rural areas, while minimising risks for biodiversity, soil and water resources, would require careful planning on EU, national and local levels. This is in line with the requirements and provisions of the Renewable Energy Directive.

Public perception was also noted as having an important influence over policy development, because media coverage of some imported biofuels had raised concerns about the high environmental impact of biofuel monocultures created in tropical rainforest regions. These factors provided the background for the AGRINERGY team in their research objectives.

Research activity

AGRINERGY partners focused their main attention on summarising and explaining links between EU bioenergy policies and the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the development of rural areas and EU policies on environmental protection. They did this by bringing together policy-makers, decision-makers, stakeholders and experts in the field of the CAP, bioenergy, environment

and international trade, in order to develop a common language and understanding.

Results from the research project were intended to inform future policy-making and analyse limits and risks of further expansion of biomass use in Europe and on international level. A sustainable increase in biomass production was predicted to provide an environmentally friendly and socially acceptable development tool for rural areas.

All of the research activity carried out by the AGRINERGY project was carefully scrutinised and discussed in detail during a series of international working group sessions, seminars and conferences. Issues examined included questions such as:

- does bioenergy contribute to local added value and can it further enhance future development of rural areas?

- what are sound policy approaches to guarantee a fair trade of biomass without further depletion of natural resources in exporting countries?
- how can sustainability measures for bioenergy be inserted in agricultural, energy and environmental policies?

The events were attended by authorities from Member States responsible for agriculture and energy policies, trade issues, rural development planning and nature protection, as well as representatives of international conventions, NGOs and scientists.

Outcomes from these events helped the AGRINERGY researchers to produce a set of policy briefs covering technical advice and practical guidance on the following issues:

- biomass and environmental effects: strategies to mitigate negative environmental effects from biomass production
- biomass and effects on future rural development: conditions under which bioenergy can contribute to employment and income opportunities in rural areas
- bioenergy policy and its relation to the future CAP and World Trade Organisation negotiations.

More information about the AGRINERGY research project is available on the project website at <http://agrinergergy.ecologic.eu>

EU neighbours: rural life in the candidate countries

Three candidate countries are hoping to become EU Member States in the near future and a number of other countries are also planning on joining the EU when they are ready. These countries support large countryside communities and their eventual accession to membership is likely to have a major impact on future EU rural policies.

Since its creation, the EU has been committed to a process of enlargement aimed at maintaining its strategic interests in stability, security and overall prosperity. The transitions implemented in Eastern and Southern Europe have now resulted in 12 additional Member States and this number is expected to grow as neighbouring countries seek to join the EU.

Impacts on EU rural development policy from the enlargement process have been explored in earlier pages of this publication and the experiences gained in rural areas during EU accession will be extremely valuable for future Member States.

Generally speaking, the prospect of even larger EU rural areas offers more opportunities and challenges for everyone. These include access to new products and markets, new consumers and clients, new and better employment, new and more efficient services as well as new possibilities for recreation and rural pursuits.

Prospective EU States

Croatia, Turkey and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia are expected to be the next new EU Member States. These 'candidate countries' are joined in their EU aspirations by 'potential candidate countries' from the Western Balkans – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo (under UNSCR 1244/99), Montenegro and Serbia. Iceland has also now indicated its interest in becoming a prospective Member State.

EU membership terminology

- **EU accession** – the process of becoming an EU Member State. Countries wishing to accede to the EU proceed from one stage of the process to the next, but only once all the conditions at each stage have been met. In this way, the prospect of accession acts as a powerful incentive for reform. The EU policy on enlargement ensures that accession brings benefits simultaneously to the EU and to the countries that join it.
- **The *acquis communautaire*** – the entire body of EU legislation. This incorporates Treaties, policies, legal acts such as regulations, directives, decisions, and resolutions adopted by the EU. Often abbreviated to ‘the *acquis*’, it comprises 35 chapters covering wide-ranging issues, including agriculture, forestry and rural development.
- **Candidate country** – countries that have already complied with an initial set of EU membership criteria in the *acquis* subjects, such as democracy standards, rule of law, human rights, market economies and ability to take on the obligations of membership.
- **Potential candidate country** – countries that are working towards meeting the requirements set out in the candidate country criteria.

The process of obtaining EU membership depends on the speed with which the candidate countries introduce the necessary political and economic reforms. While it is still difficult to provide an exact date for the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and even more so for the potential candidate countries, it is generally agreed that the accession of Turkey will be a medium- to long-term process in light of the extent of the reforms required, particularly in rural areas. However, it is hoped that Croatia, with its rich biodiversity and strong local tourism sector may be able to gain EU membership in 2011.

The accession process and rural areas

The accession process involves countries acquiring the capacity to incorporate and manage the *acquis communautaire*, including the requirements regarding EU rural development policy. The European Commission and other organisations provide special assistance to help countries gain these capacities using a number of different rural development tools.

A main focus for this institutional capacity building work in rural areas combines modernisation and adaptation of the agricultural sector with reinforcement

of rural economies through economic diversification and investment in infrastructure. Pilot schemes have also been set up to introduce the principles of agri-environmental measures and Leader approaches.

Steady progress in these areas is being made by both candidate and potential candidate countries. Nevertheless, the road to EU membership is also creating some significant challenges that need to be addressed en route and one critical rural development issue concerns the future of local populations.

Development processes based on modernising agriculture by increasing farm size and substituting capital for labour usually lead to a significant reduction in traditional rural (i.e. agricultural) employment options. This risks an influx into rural labour markets by a large number of potential workers with limited education and few transferable skills. Should these people be forced to move to urban centres, already on the brink of saturation due to their own internal growth? Where might they find new positions and roles in rural areas?

Answers to these complex questions are not straightforward and pose real challenges to rural development

policies in these countries. The aim will be to implement coordinated sets of actions that allow these populations to participate fully in the new economic and social dynamics of rural areas.

Agriculture, forestry and other established elements of rural economies will continue to make important contributions during the EU accession process, as will innovative development initiatives.

The assistance and experience gained from previous transition programmes will be invaluable and the mutual benefits that are available for everyone from an enlarged EU rural community ultimately remain reliant on those who wish to enjoy them.



Y. TEKELIOGLU

Some rural facts and figures about candidate countries

- Production in rural areas is often intended primarily for own-consumption or sale in local markets.
- Many rural areas lack capacity to provide alternative employment to agriculture.
- Development is hindered by insufficient infrastructure, poor education and absence of professional organisations.
- Rural areas account for 92% of Croatian territory and support 47.6% of the national population.
- Average farm size in Croatia is 2.4 ha and only 1.4 ha in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.
- Agriculture in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia accounts for 11.4% of GDP and 19.5% of the economically active population.
- In Turkey, agriculture provides about one third of total employment. This means that around six million Turks earn their living directly from agriculture.
- Turkey is one of the world’s major producers of cereals, cotton, tobacco, fruit and vegetables, dried fruits and sheep and goat meat.

EU neighbours: rural developments in the candidate countries

Large amounts of practical and policy-based rural development work is underway in the countries seeking to join the EU. Much of this is tailored to the EU accession process and supported from a mix of international sources.

The rural sector is of key importance to candidate and potential candidate countries, both in social and economic terms. The majority of these countries' population lives in rural areas, which generate essential income from agriculture and other rural economic activities. A range of different rural development activities operate within the countries and these are being implemented by international organisations like the EU, World Bank and United Nations.

EU membership preparations

Assistance from the EU until 2006 came from five programmes and instruments: Phare, ISPA, SAPARD, CARDS and the Turkey pre-accession instrument. Of these, SAPARD was the Special Accession Programme for Agricultural and Rural Development supporting structural adjustments and infrastructure strengthening.

In the current 2007–13 period, the EU provides an increasing amount of rural development support to candidate

and potential candidate countries. This is channelled primarily through a single funding programme known as the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA). IPA brings all previous pre-accession support into one single, focused instrument and consists of five components.

Direct EU support for rural development is provided under IPA component V, known as IPARD. IPARD helps candidate countries to prepare for implementation of the *acquis communautaire* regarding the Common Agricultural Policy. The IPARD assistance also supports national administrations to implement certain types of rural development measures and approaches, such as agri-environmental schemes and Leader-type measures. In potential candidate countries, IPARD is used to prepare national authorities for these rural development measures and approaches.

EU support for rural development is also provided in both candidate and potential candidate countries via territorial cooperation programmes, funded by the Directorate-General for

Regional Policy. These types of rural development project can be financed under measures that: promote the management of natural resources, support accessibility between rural and urban areas, encourage innovative entrepreneurship in rural territories, and assist sustainable tourism.

Rural development assistance provided by other international donors target similar types of activity and a large proportion of overall aid is coordinated to complement the countries' EU accession agendas. In particular, this involves preparing the national authorities and rural areas for using mainstream EU support, such as the Structural Funds and European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD).

Reducing regional disparities

Key objectives of these EU preparation programmes focus on reducing regional disparities. This includes a variety of policy-based work covering design of strategic rural development plans, institutional capacity building and strengthening the business environment in rural areas.

Project-based work is also heavily supported through investments in rural production systems, food security, farm improvements and rural infrastructure. Sustainable development principles play an increasingly important role and economic growth is carefully planned to complement environmental protection.

Many of these investments are co-financed by the candidate countries' governments and the national authorities remain fully committed to supporting their rural areas' long-term prosperity.

The following three cases studies from candidate countries illustrate some of the rural development activities that are being implemented in support of the candidate countries' EU accession processes.

Key success factors of rural development activities in candidate countries include:

- use of participative approaches
- smaller scale projects have useful demonstration effects and pave the way for further development
- partnerships between local actors encourage stakeholders to take ownership of local problems and solutions, develop self confidence and build trust for taking common action to solve common problems
- linkages between central and local government are important for the effectiveness of large scale projects
- ensuring a balance between economic, environmental and social considerations
- stakeholder capacity building
- making best use of existing rural infrastructure
- integrated approaches work best for tackling multiple disadvantages.

Monitoring rural competitiveness in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

How important is rural development in FYROM?

- Almost half of the country's total area is agricultural
- Agriculture accounts for 12% of GDP, and this figure increases to 16% with the inclusion of food processing
- 36% of employment is connected with agriculture
- Rural areas suffer from poorly developed infrastructure
- Most farms only income source is from agricultural production
- Low income levels are common in rural areas which often lack alternative income sources

Improving the competitiveness of agricultural holdings and the food industry is one of the main objectives of the IPARD programme in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM). Priority 1 of the programme concerns improvements in market efficiency and implementation of Community standards. Support includes investment in agricultural holdings and in processing and marketing agricultural products in order to upgrade to Community standards. It is concentrated on sectors where the related *acquis* standards are particularly demanding, and this includes the wine sector which is noted as one of the priority sectors.

Viticulture is an important source of income and employment in rural areas in the FYROM. Combined grape and wine production contributes up to 20% of agricultural GDP. Wine is the country's top beverage export and the second biggest agricultural export after tobacco.

There is a history of EU support to this sector in the FYROM and some €1.5 million has been provided by EU sources in support of the country's wine sector.

One of these projects is a pioneering initiative, titled 'Monitoring and

Management System for Vineyards', which has helped rural stakeholders in FYROM improve the competitiveness of their wine sector. The project has helped strengthen institutional capacity and has set the ground for an effective monitoring of the sector, as well as assisted improvements in the quality of production processes.

Under the first phase of the project, completed in October 2006, the EU helped to: revamp legislation, strengthen the capacity of the government to monitor and manage grape and wine production, and established a pilot vineyard register of wine produced in the country.

In a second phase between, May 2007 and January 2009, the EU allocated €475 000 to assist the country with the creation of a National Vineyard Monitoring and Management System. The main aim of this phase was to extend the pilot vineyard cadastre across the entire country. The resulting vineyard cadastre provided the basis to enable accurate monitoring and management of grape and wine production systems. It also applies a guarantee of origin system to ensure quality.

The project is a good example of a rural development initiative that has improved

competitiveness of a key socio-economic and environmental sector. By targeting the wine sector in FYROM, the EU assistance has fostered the production of bottled wines and increased their export potential. These outcomes fit well with the policy objectives of the IPARD programme in the FYROM.

The success of the project lies in its sectoral focus, since wine is one of the main agriculture exported commodities. Furthermore, the project's emphasis on institutional capacity improvements has created a solid foundation for future monitoring of quality, which will have a direct positive impact on the country's ability to compete in the EU wine sector.

Improving the competitiveness of agriculture in Croatia

How important is rural development in Croatia?

- 91.6% of the total area is classified as rural and only 8.4% as urban
- 47.6% of the population live in rural areas
- 64% of the rural population are active economic persons
- 17% of the Instrument for Pre-Accession funds for 2007–13 is allocated to rural development.

One of the key factors for improving the competitiveness of agriculture in Croatia is an integrated approach that encompasses institutional capacity building and harmonisation of legislation with the EU *acquis*. An EU funded project titled 'Capacity building in the area of live animals and food products' used this approach as a part of its strategy to establish a new food safety system and a new institutional framework.

Financed by the CARDS 2004 programme, this project was principally targeted at the Croatian Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management. Other target institutions included in the project were the Croatian Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, the Croatian Veterinary Institute and the Croatian Food Agency. The overall objective was to facilitate the trade of agricultural and processed agricultural products, thus increasing Croatia's competitiveness and presence in the European and world markets.

To achieve this objective, the project supported the harmonisation of legislation on food safety, veterinary public health and quality with the EU *acquis*. Capacity-building actions were introduced to enhance the preconditions for a successful implementation of the

harmonised legislation. These activities involved a programme of training for relevant stakeholders, which was complemented by the development of guidelines to assist implementation of harmonised legislation.

Such actions aimed specifically to strengthen institutional and administrative capacities by improving the technical know-how and human resources for implementing EU standards and enforcing harmonised legislation. The implementation of harmonised legislation included the adoption of an action plan for the introduction of HACCP (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point) principles. Capacity building was again a key component of this action plan that trained food business operators and official inspectors on the application of HACCP principles.

One of the success features of the EU project has been its use of effective communication as a mechanism to instil a culture of participation and ownership of the new food safety system across all relevant stakeholders in the sector. A specific awareness-raising campaign was organised to improve communication between actors involved in food safety and food quality. This provided information to stakeholders about food

hygiene matters and the new legal framework for food quality.

The upgrading of food establishments is another critical issue in the process of harmonisation to the EU food safety standards. The project has therefore also assisted Croatian authorities with the implementation of the national plan for upgrading of food establishments. This is expected to have a tangible positive impact on trade in agricultural and processed agricultural products in European and world markets.

The CARDS project is a good example of a coordinated EU rural development initiative that combines legislative improvements, technological upgrading, capacity building and awareness raising for all actors involved in food safety and food quality. The project's achievements will have many practical benefits in terms of bringing Croatia's agricultural and processed agricultural products into the European and world markets with a competitive advantage.

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European Evaluation Network for Rural Development

WELCOME TO THE European Network for Rural Development (ENRD)

Rural development is of special importance for the EU, and not least for all those living and working in rural areas. One of the key goals of the ENRD – and indeed the EU's rural development strategy – is to help bring rural communities closer together in order to improve the implementation of the Rural Development Policy. This means strengthening the flows of information and communication between the different levels of Europe's rural stakeholders. In turn this will encourage a greater and more efficient level of interaction and exchange of expertise in all areas of ENRD activity. In addition, it will also help to facilitate specific actions such as sharing of experience and evaluation of rural development policy. This is a text.

Read more...

With this in mind, the new ENRD website incorporates a variety of features and rural development information. It also provides links to other relevant websites, at European, national and local levels.

One of these is the **European Evaluation Network for Rural Development**, which is a distinct network within ENRD dealing specifically with evaluation issues, providing content development, support and guidance, and information and dissemination services to evaluation actors in Member States (administrators, RDP evaluators, academics/researchers) and to the Commission.

In the near future interactive tools will also be available like for example data bases, search tools or an exchange platform.

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EVENTS

NETWORK MEETINGS

National Rural Network (NRN) meetings allow for regular contact between networks in order to discuss common issues and challenges. The first of these meetings took place in Brussels on November 27th 2008, the sixth meeting took place in Budapest on September 16th and 17th 2009.

COMMITTEES

The next **Leader Subcommittee** meeting has been scheduled for the 12/11/2009 (to be confirmed).

The next **Coordination committee** meeting has been scheduled for the 9/11/2009 (to be confirmed).

Notice about site language

Please note that this web site is only available in English for the moment. Other language versions will be available in the near future.

The European Network for Rural Development ONLINE

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