



# Report of the 11<sup>th</sup> meeting of the European Rural Networks' Steering Group

Brussels, 13 May 2019



## Morning session

Welcome and Introduction	
<p>9.30 – 10.00 Welcome and Introduction</p> <p>Mario Milouchev, DG AGRI</p>	<p>The key objectives of the 11<sup>th</sup> Steering Group Meeting were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To discuss the recent and planned activities of the European Rural Networks</li> <li>• To exchange on the outcomes from <a href="#">networX</a> conference held in April 2019 in Brussels and messages that could be taken forward in future networking activities</li> <li>• To discuss the next steps for self- assessment of the Rural Networks</li> <li>• To exchange on the ideas for ENRD activities in 2019-2020</li> <li>• To make preliminary proposals for the next RNs' Steering Group and RNs' Assembly</li> </ul> <p>The Chair opened the meeting stressing how the <a href="#">networX</a> event, held in Brussels in April 2019, demonstrated the important role networking has played in supporting the implementation of rural development programmes, fostering innovation and helping make EU rural policy work in practice. He underlined that encouraging overall exchange of best practices, raising awareness, and creating and maintaining connections between rural communities will gain even greater importance in the CAP post 2020.</p> <p>Furthermore, the Chair pointed out some key changes Europe will face in the second half of 2019: a new European Parliament, a new College of Commissioners, as well as challenges related to Brexit and the adoption of the Multi-annual financial framework for the next programming period 2021-2027. The Chair gave a short update on the process of adoption of the CAP post-2020 legislative proposals. The Commission's work with the co-legislators is advancing well and solid progress is expected during the summer.</p>
networX Feedback	
<p>10.00 – 10.45 Feedback on networX</p> <p>Alistair Prior, UK-Scotland NSU</p>	<p>After showing a short <a href="#">video clip</a> from the event, six participants shared their <a href="#">key messages</a> from the six thematic strands of networX. The overall feedback was very positive: this event provided a unique opportunity to meet new colleagues from all over Europe and engage in enriching conversations, share good practices and develop new ideas for the future CAP networks. Most of the sessions used interactive methodologies that will be adopted by some of the participants in their engagement with their own colleagues and stakeholders.</p>

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<p><b>Maria Custódia Correia, Portuguese NSU</b></p>	<p>The six speakers agreed on the importance of the <a href="#">Marketplace</a> – an integral part of the networX programme – to show how rural development policy works on the ground. They also stressed that the <a href="#">Rural Inspiration Awards</a> showcased real success stories and were a precious opportunity for the networks themselves to identify inspiring EAFRD-supported initiatives from their own countries.</p>
<p><b>Teemu Hauhia, Finnish NSU</b></p>	<p>Following the presentations, the discussion on networX allowed SG members to underline the benefits of such a networking event in terms of new connections and possible future collaborations, and the difficulty for environmental NGOs in attending the whole event or participating with a stand due to their own lack of human resources. It was mentioned that for the future, livestreaming and online interaction may help engage larger audiences remotely. Stakeholders and SG members also stressed that the involvement of other Directorates General such as DG Environment should be encouraged and considered.</p>
<p><b>Ute Ally, DG AGRI</b></p>	<p>Overall, the SG concluded that the networX conference showed the importance of networking in rural areas, the positive effects networking has had in implementation of the RDPs and in creating the linkages between different stakeholders.</p>
<p><b>Katerina Vrublova, Copa-Cogeca</b></p>	
<p><b>Karin Ellerman-Kuegler, Verband der Landwirtschaftskammern e. V. (WLB)</b></p>	

### Proposals for the future ENRD activities – ENRD Contact Point

<p><b>10:45 - 11:00</b></p>	<p>The <a href="#">proposed ENRD CP activities</a> for the period mid-2019/mid-2020 were outlined, taking into account discussions with a wide range of stakeholders that took place primarily during networX, building on lessons from current RDPs in the preparation of future CAP Strategic Plans. The thematic priorities will aim to build on the momentum generated by the CP's past and current work and match the interest expressed by stakeholders for specific topics.</p>
<p>Overview of proposals</p>	<p>As in previous years, in defining the work programme for the coming year inputs from the SG were particularly sought. The participants split for two rounds of parallel working groups to discuss the proposed capacity building and thematic priorities for the future ENRD CP work.</p>
<p><b>Michael Gregory, ENRD CP</b></p>	

### Group discussions

<p><b>11:00 – 11:45</b></p>	<p>Round 1: Capacity Building</p>
<p>Capacity Building: Interactive exercise and discussion</p>	<p>Working Group 1: Supporting more effective and simpler programme implementation</p>
	<p>Participants expressed an overall consensus on the proposed main topics and activities for the period mid-2019/mid-2020, to support a more effective and simpler programme implementation (i.e. the role and organisation of Monitoring Committees in the new CAP and stakeholder involvement;</p>

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	<p>programming the post-2020 CAP; knowledge transfer, demonstration farm and advisory services; animal welfare, food safety and quality). These were considered by the group to be a good mix of proposals, responding to the needs of Managing Authorities and stakeholders. As further suggestions, particularly in relation to a possible event addressing animal welfare and food safety and quality, participants stressed the importance of ensuring links with Specific Objective 9 of the future CAP and of including a focus on food waste, when developing the event content and concept. The group also suggested to extend the stakeholder groups where relevant for specific topics, to strengthen the workshops with background analytical activities and to show more practical examples.</p> <p><b>Working Group 2: Strengthening NRNs and NSUs</b></p> <p>The feedback recommended the development of clearer messages for local-level stakeholders, using more visual and accessible materials including Webinars and videos. Participants called for increased opportunities to bring together European and local rural stakeholders, for instance inviting them to participate in NRN meetings. Suggestions for the organisation of a new Good Practice Competition were considered, building on the Rural Inspiration Awards, capitalising on existing examples and focusing on the engagement of agricultural, territorial and environmental stakeholders. Any such competition should make use of video materials and be linked to an event aimed at maximising participation and dissemination.</p> <p><b>Working Group 3: Simpler and more effective rolling out of CLLD</b></p> <p>This group stressed the importance of communication to evidence the added-value of LEADER for Rural Development and foster specific strategies at local and regional levels. Messages should target well-defined audiences, with priority given to ‘unusual suspects’. Tools and materials could be produced and shared to be used more effectively by LAGs themselves. The Thematic Labs methodology is effective but must avoid being too generic, having instead concrete focus and outcomes, and involving influencers – those that can effect change in policy and its implementation.</p>
<p><b>11:45 – 12:30</b></p> <p>Thematic Priorities: Interactive exercise and discussion</p>	<p><b>Round 2: Thematic Priorities</b></p> <p><b>Working Group 4 – Proposed Focus: Smart Villages</b></p> <p>This group pointed to the emerging need for adapting the support provided for Smart Villages to the national/regional context. Member States differ widely in terms of their existing policy landscape and their needs in terms of digitalisation, mobility, decentralised energy production, services, farming, and depopulation. One possible method would be to programme flexible preparatory support for innovatory local responses to these needs by applying an approach similar to that of Operational Groups (OGs) while also</p>

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ensuring alignment with other funding opportunities. Participants suggested considering demand-led meetings for particular groups of countries and/or issues. Communication through examples was stressed as a way to engage more stakeholders through existing and new tools (e.g. webinars, moderated Facebook groups).

#### Working Group 5 – Proposed Focus: Bioeconomy and climate action

The group supported the idea of continuing the current thematic work on rural bioeconomy, especially in view of the future CAP strategic plans, and further disseminating its results. There is also a need to ensure those actions discussed within the Thematic Group (TG) are replicated in MS activities. The TG proposed for 2019-2020 would bring added value by focusing further on environmental sustainability and biodiversity. The new climate theme will enable additional synergies with NRNs, OGs and researchers. It was suggested to reach out more to local-level stakeholders (e.g. advisory services) and to form a stronger link with the ENRD work on Smart Villages.

#### Working Group 6: Proposed Focus: Approaches to revitalising rural areas

This discussion concluded that local and territorial solutions should be sought to address revitalising rural areas and depopulation challenges and considered that the topic should be looked at as an opportunity, not just a challenge, presenting strong examples and stories that highlight positive messages. As this topic is cross-sectoral, synergies between funds, European Commission DGs and rural development initiatives (e.g. LEADER, Smart Villages) should be identified.

Overall, there was agreement on the proposed 2019-2020 ENRD activities to be supported by the Contact Point.

## Afternoon session

Planned Network Activities	
<p><b>14:45 – 15:00</b></p> <p>Rural Networks' Self-Assessment</p> <p>Giuliana Keller DG AGRI</p>	<p>The planned Rural Networks' <a href="#">self-assessment process</a> for 2019 will have a lighter format, as suggested during the last <a href="#">Rural Networks' Assembly</a> in December 2018. The draft survey which will be sent to the RNs governance groups and sub-groups and to the Expert group on monitoring and evaluating the CAP was presented. The final version, to be launched in June, will be shared with the SG after taking into account any additional comments the members might have.</p> <p>Presentation of the first findings of the self-assessment exercise is envisaged during the 12<sup>th</sup> SG meeting in October and the key results, complete with recommendations from the SG are foreseen to be presented to the 6<sup>th</sup> Rural Networks' Assembly in December.</p>

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	<p>The Q&amp;A following the presentation allowed for clarification that the survey will not be linked to the assessment of the Civil Dialogue Groups. It will collect further inputs for the future and focus on the work of the networks against the current objectives.</p>
<p><b>15.45 - 16.15</b> Planned Network Activities</p> <p><b>Margarida Ambar,</b> EIP-AGRI Service Point</p>	<p>The <a href="#">presentation</a> of the upcoming EIP-AGRI activities focused on the recent Operational Groups (OGs) <a href="#">Assessment</a>.</p> <p>The first challenge in this study was to collect enough information on as many OGs as possible and, with the support of many NRNs, it was possible to gather data on about 600 projects. The assessment focused on the projects, on partnerships structure, and on collaboration and dissemination activities.</p>
<p><b>16.15 – 16.45</b> Planned Network Activities</p> <p><b>Hannes Wimmer,</b> ENRD Evaluation Helpdesk</p>	<p>The <a href="#">presentation</a> of the Evaluation Helpdesk's planned activities highlighted the technical support to be provided to Member States for carrying out their evaluation tasks in 2019, as well as for <a href="#">preparing the ex-ante evaluation of the CAP Strategic Plans 2021-2027</a>.</p> <p>The discussion that followed the presentation clarified that the European Commission's proposal for the CAP Strategic Plan Regulation envisages even a bigger role for evaluation. However, details cannot be confirmed as the proposal is still under discussion.</p> <p>A more general request to the ENRD CP, EIP-AGRI Service Point and ENRD Evaluation Helpdesk was to circulate presentations and background information, as far as possible, in advance of the governance meetings, to allow participants to prepare relevant questions in consultation with their colleagues.</p>
<p><b>Outlook</b></p>	
<p><b>16.45 – 17.15</b></p> <p>Report Back, Outlook and Closing Remarks</p> <p><b>Mario Milouchev,</b> DG AGRI</p>	<p>The Chair invited the participants to suggest any preliminary ideas of topics for the 12<sup>th</sup> Steering Group meeting in October or the 6<sup>th</sup> RN Assembly meeting in December.</p> <p>Suggestions included updates on the discussion on the future CAP and indications on how to deal with the transition period between the two programming periods. It was suggested that for the next Assembly: (i) an information point on the state of play on the future Multi-Annual Financial Framework should be included; (ii) an invitation to attend should be extended to the new European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development.</p> <p>In addition to an exchange on the upcoming RNs' self-assessment, a possible topic for future consideration could be the issue of the future governance structure of the EU CAP Network, including a reflection on experiences from the current arrangements.</p>

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A request was made for a presentation or workshop on specific eco-scheme initiatives, for which not all Member States are fully prepared. This would help the MS in view of the future CAP, where eco-schemes and enhanced subsidiarity are expected to play an important role.

Relevant activities planned by the stakeholders include a series of meetings with economic and social partners, farmers and environmental organisations organised by the Austrian Ministry of Agriculture in close cooperation with the NRN, to jointly prepare for the future CAP. The Chair noted that many MS have started preparation activities and reminded participants that the European Commission is available to participate in such events.

In closing the meeting, the Chair summarised the key discussion points. The SG will convene again in Brussels in October for the 12<sup>th</sup> SG meeting.

NB: The **confirmed** next meeting dates are now:

**21 October** for 12<sup>th</sup> SG (not 22<sup>nd</sup> as announced at SG)

**16 December** for 6<sup>th</sup> RN assembly

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