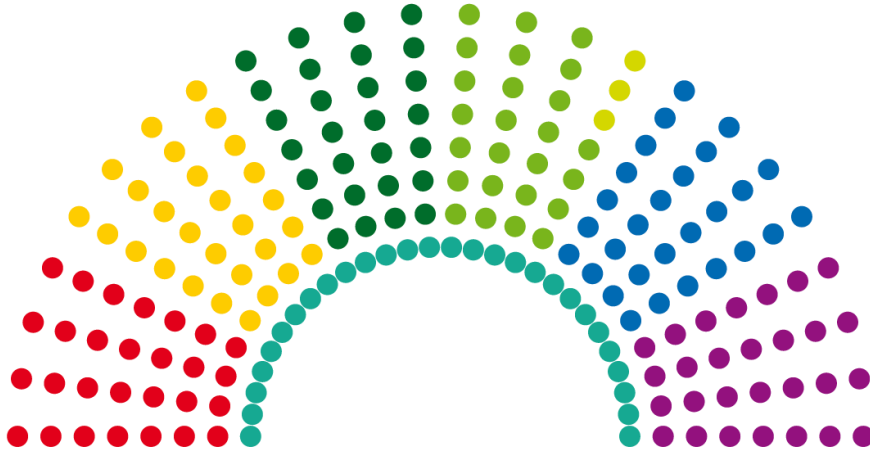




European Network for
Rural Development



Report of 7th Meeting
European Rural Networks' Assembly

Webinar, 04 December 2020

Introduction and update from the Commission	
<p>09:20–11:00 Welcome and introduction</p> <p>Mario Milouchev, Director, DG AGRI</p>	<p>The Chair welcomed all participants to the 7th European Rural Networks' Assembly meeting and explained that this was the final governance meeting of 2020, following two Steering Groups, two LEADER/CLLD Sub-group and two Innovation Sub-group meetings. He briefly introduced the Agenda and highlighted the objectives of the meeting.</p> <p>The Chair confirmed that rural networking will continue during the transition period and expressed the view that networking approaches will be reinforced within the context of the post-2020 Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) framework. Assembly members' views on future CAP networking arrangements are currently being considered by the Commission.</p>
<p>Opening remarks, Wolfgang Burtscher, Director-General, DG AGRI</p>	<p>Mr Burtscher opened the meeting by acknowledging the contribution from the Rural Networks in support of European rural development. He highlighted the importance of knowledge sharing through networking and advisory initiatives. The existing critical mass of knowledge and innovation potential that exists in Rural Networks was also recognised, and he underlined the potential for building on this in the future.</p> <p>DG AGRI's Director-General noted that the European Green Deal (EGD) requires the CAP to deliver on environmental and climate objectives while effectively balancing such goals with safeguarding socio-economic impacts. This needs to be a cornerstone of rural development policy and the CAP Strategic Plans (CSPs).</p> <p>Mr Burtscher provided an update on the recommendations to Member States (MS) regarding their national CSPs. The recommendations are legally non-binding and have been prepared in close consultation with MS authorities. A key aim is to help MS address EGD goals through the CAP framework. He drew attention to the Farm to Fork Strategy in this context and promoted the importance of well-structured, ambitious CSPs that can address sustainability via holistic approaches. Inputs from a diverse range of local, regional, and national stakeholders should continue to be encouraged during CSP preparations.</p> <p>Referring to the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas, Mr Burtscher confirmed the role of the ENRD Conference in March as one of the useful channels for gathering stakeholder views on the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas. Conference outputs should help contribute to evidence-based policies concerning the future of rural Europe and associated support options.</p> <p>In his conclusions, Mr Burtscher reiterated that holistic synergies can flow from rural stakeholders such as the Assembly's membership continuing to work together through strong networking arrangements. The new CAP foresees continuous integration of both its Pillars which involves collaboration and common operational frameworks to achieve comprehensive and sustainable developmental benefits for rural Europe's stakeholders.</p>

<p>Q&A</p>	<p>Responding to a question by Marine Gaudron (CEMR) about the Future of Europe Conference, Mr Burtscher indicated that the challenge for society is to address large-scale transition, including impacts of the global pandemic and climate change. He observed the importance of tackling challenges faced specifically by rural areas, including demography challenges and declining economies. Benefits can be gained from ‘rural proofing’ and caution was advocated to avoid overly compartmentalising society.</p> <p>The Commission’s recommendations to MS on CSPs are informed and take account of analyses of issues in individual MS. Recommendations feature the environment and fair distribution of income as well as the livelihoods of rural areas. Targets and interventions are to be set by the MS.</p>
<p>State of play on CAP developments and other Commission initiatives – Mihail Dumitru, Deputy Director-General, DG AGRI</p>	<p>Mr Dumitru’s presentation reviewed the main points from the current proposals for CAP post-2020. The timeline for future action was presented, starting from the beginning of the transition period. The main points in his presentation covered an increased focus of the future CAP on better targeting and fairer distribution of support, results-based interventions and innovation, including through digitalisation. Notable recent policy considerations also affecting the state of play on CAP developments include: the European Green Deal and its related strategies; pandemic management; and an overall resilience strengthening.</p> <p>The green and digital transition are predicted to remain prominent priorities throughout the CAP transition period (2021-2022). The Commission will safeguard against risks of backsliding during the transition period’s use of the European Recovery Instrument (EURI) and ensure that Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) allocations for environment, climate, LEADER, etc. remain at the required levels.</p> <p>A summary of the current negotiations between co-legislators confirmed that agreements were still being sought. These related mainly to direct payments, the performance framework and the green architecture. Consensus was expected in Spring 2021, thereby allowing the secondary implementation acts to be confirmed by September 2021. CAP Strategic Plans (CSPs) would be submitted by MS and approved by the Commission in time to allow CSPs to become operational on 1 January 2023.</p> <p>MS-specific recommendations were being prepared by DG AGRI together with MS as part of the CSP preparation process. A Communication featuring these recommendations was highlighted that would reflect, among other points, the SWOT analyses undertaken by MS.</p> <p>Turning to the topic of networking, Mr. Dumitru underscored the significance of CAP networking for, and after, the transition period. Networking can continue to support meeting rural development needs in MS and aid the move towards CSPs</p>

Q&A

becoming operational. The proposed national CAP Networks for each MS need to be established within 12 months of CSP approval.

New support units for the European CAP Network will be established at EU level and the procurement process for the services was underway (via four different Lots). These new support units will build on the last two programming periods' achievements and the capacity-building resources from the current Rural Networks will be preserved for future use.

Mr Dumitru concluded his presentation with a reminder about the benefits of multi-actor networking approaches during CAP delivery and echoed Mr Burtcher's reference to the potential that research and development offers for rural Europe.

In response to a question from Maria Custódia Correia (Portuguese NRN) about the future role of rural networking, the Commission replied that NRNs will continue to play important roles during the transition period. NRNs can expand their work and tasks to cover Pillar I subjects during the transition. This can include linkages between both CAP Pillars in areas such as the integration of eco-schemes during CSP programming. The proposals for CAP post-2020 also offer new flexibilities which require MS to agree on their own priorities for the CSPs' foci. NRNs were seen to be able to assist in the process of reaching these agreements at MS level.

In response to Karin Ellerman Kuegler's (Agricultural Advisory Service Provider, Germany) question on the simplification of CAP delivery, Mr. Dumitru replied by clarifying that simplification details will be confirmed mainly in the secondary legislation. The Commission will act as an honest broker and seek an enabling position that balances the goals of simplification with the goals of introducing new arrangements efficiently, such as additional ambitions on environment and climate. Avoiding gold plating remains a core intention of the Commission and choices may ultimately be needed to differentiate between the aspects of "need to know" and "nice to know" during CAP simplification. This aims to provide less and more targeted information.

Karīna Afremoviča (MA, Latvia) posed a question about the Multiannual Financial Framework. The Commission's reply confirmed that contingency options could be activated for CAP in Pillar 1. Pillar 2 finance and new support including the EU Recovery Instrument was at the time still contingent on EU budget adoption.

A question from Luís Chaves (MINHA TERRA, Portugal) concerned LEADER/CLLD arrangements post-2020. The Commission clarified that coordination occurs between DGs with CLLD remits. Partnership principles remain legally binding for CAP operations post 2020 at MS level and this offers opportunities to strengthen practical arrangements for achieving synergies between CAP and other EU financing.

<p>Q&A</p>	<p>'sustainability'. 'Farmers', 'resilience' and 'innovation' were also among recurrent keywords in the poll.</p> <p>Before introducing the Q&A session, the Chair noted the differing results that can exist between methods and typologies used to define rural areas, as these can produce different interpretations. This is being addressed in consultation with Eurostat.</p> <p>The chair referred to outcomes from 2016's Cork rural development conference. The Commission informed Assembly members that they were currently in listening mode about how the LTVRA could be applied at local, national and EU levels.</p>
<p>Highlights from EU research projects and initiatives relevant for the activities of Rural Networks</p>	
<p>12:25 – 12:45</p> <p>Tereza Budnakova and Inge van Oost, DG AGRI</p>	<p>European research and innovation missions are a policy initiative for Horizon Europe and DG AGRI's presentation included a focus on the Mission area of soil health and food. Assembly members were invited to help during the soil mission's public consultations because "caring for soils is caring for life".</p> <p>NRNs' outreach tools were seen as useful for sharing CAP-related research similar to the soil mission. Tereza Budnakova confirmed that the missions are not purely research instruments and that training, advice or citizen engagement could be eligible costs.</p> <p>In her presentation, Inge van Oost reinforced the message from DG AGRI that research and innovation remain very relevant within the context of CAP networking. CAP Networks would be able to make use of agricultural and other rural advisory services involved with fostering new approaches to using and implementing the CAP budget. The new innovation ecosystem for CAP post-2020 is intended to cover a broad spectrum of socio-economic and environmental research topics.</p> <p>More knowledge transfer via peer-learning exchanges will help boost the associated benefits for rural Europe. Upscaling and sharing of advisor competences could further boost such benefits. Lighthouse initiatives were spotlighted as opportunities for MS to coordinate inter-related research projects via umbrella approaches.</p>
<p>Rural networks in 2020 - Taking stock of achievements so far and looking ahead</p>	
<p>14:15 – 15:30</p> <p>ENRD -John Grieve (Contact Point), Hannes Wimmer (Evaluation Help Desk) and Pacôme Elouna Eyenga (EIP-Service Point)</p>	<p>This part of the Assembly agenda reviewed achievements related to ENRD / EIP-AGRI outputs.</p> <p>A presentation and video summarising key milestones from the ENRD Contact Point's work were provided by John Grieve. This was followed by an interactive series of short interventions from Contact Point team members who reflected on their personal perspectives on ENRD successes such as: providing a useful neutral exchange forum for RDP practitioners; strengthening the NRNs' stakeholder</p>

<p>Q&A</p>	<p>engagement; tackling topical challenges; collating critical masses of expertise; applying global goals locally; and possessing rapid reaction capacity.</p> <p>Hannes Wimmer presented an overview of the Evaluation Helpdesk's activities and future actions. He summarised the Helpdesk's major outputs in terms of ENRD objectives for instance, inter alia: explaining the Common Monitoring and Evaluation system; supporting MS to assess results and impacts; improving data-management; in addition to drawing lessons for ex-ante and ex-post evaluation. Support for, and synergies with NRNs, AKIS, and LEADER were also noted.</p> <p>Pacôme Elouna Eyenga's presentation promoted a new report and video describing a selection of EIP-AGRI's main accomplishments. These featured testimonials from farmers, researchers, NRNs, advisors, and Operational Group (OG) stakeholders. The new set of EIP-AGRI stories tell of how instrumental the CAP's AKIS support has been for MS and how the Service Point has helped to facilitate the transfer of knowledge from OGs to their target audiences.</p> <p>Kari Kylkilahti of the Kantri LAG in Finland asked about the impact of Brexit on the future of CAP networking. The Commission considered that British input could continue to be used in the same way that peers and experts from other external countries already participate in EU networking activities.</p>
<p>Next steps & closing</p>	
<p>15:30 – 15:45</p>	<p>The Chair thanked all participants, speakers, and organisers at this online meeting of the Assembly. Mr Milouchev then outlined the next governance meetings on 23rd February (LEADER/CLLD Sub-group), 18th March (Innovation Sub-group) and 25th May (Steering Group).</p> <p>He thanked the support units of the EU Rural Networks for their work in the past years. He reminded members about the LTVRA consultation processes and the enabling package (available in 22 languages).</p> <p>Assembly members were also encouraged to submit Rural Inspiration Awards-RIA 2021 entries by 18 January 2021 and to join the Rural Vision Conference in March.</p>