Self-assessment of the European Rural Networks

Final Report

N.B.:This document is a collection of the output and result-level information gathered during the self-assessment exercise carried out by the EU Rural Networks in 2019 under the guidance of the Steering Group.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

This report is a collection of the output and result-level information gathered during the second self-assessment exercise undertaken by the EU Rural Networks (RN) in 2019. The report is based on the cumulative values of the output and result indicators, which were collected from the Support Units during Summer 2019. The indicator values cover the period from 2014 to mid-2019. In addition, the report was informed by a self-assessment survey, which was open for responses from main stakeholders between June and August 2019. Furthermore, the EU RN Steering Group discussed the output and result level findings in its 12th meeting in October 2019 and provided reflections for improvements. Finally, the EU RN Assembly validated and complemented Steering Group reflections in its 6th meeting in December 2019 (see chapter 5).

Report structure

The report starts with an introduction to the European Rural Networks. In chapter 3, the concept of self-assessment is introduced and the self-assessment process is explained. Chapter 4 discusses in detail the outputs and results related to the EU Rural Networks' general and specific objectives. Under each objective, the output data is discussed first, followed by the result level data and survey results. Where possible, the outputs and results have been compared to the 2017 self-assessment exercise.[1] Chapter 5 details the Steering Group and Assembly reflections. Annexes 1 and 2 include the self-assesment survey questionnaire and a list of EIP-AGRI Focus Groups.

2. EU Rural Networks

Networking has a prominent role in the European rural development policy. In the 2014-2020 programming period, there are two networks at the European level, namely the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD)[2] and the European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability (EIP-AGRI) network.[3]

The work of the ENRD and EIP-AGRI network is guided by formal governance structures bringing together rural development and agricultural innovation stakeholder groups. The Rural Networks' Assembly meets annually to provide strategic direction, guidance and advice to the ENRD and EIP-AGRI network. It highlights emerging issues and important topics for the networks to focus on.

The smaller Rural Networks' Steering Group follows up the work of the ENRD and EIP-AGRI network two times a year. Its role is to ensure good coordination of thematic work. The two European Rural Networks have a common strategic framework[4], which describes the intervention role of the networks, and

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[1] The 2019 self-assessment survey contained some, but not all, of the same questions as the 2017 self-assessment survey. Hence, it was not possible to compare the answers of all questions.

[2] Article 52 of the regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council.

[3] Article 53 of the regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council.

[4] The Strategic Framework of the European Rural Networks, https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/enrd/files/sg7_strategic-assessment-framework.pdf

contains objectives and indicators. The strategic framework has three general objectives and seven specific objectives, responsibility for which is assigned to ENRD and/or EIP-AGRI, namely:

General objectives	Specific objectives	Responsibility
1. Enhance participation	- Increase involvement of stakeholders - Establish a dialogue between farmers and the research community - Facilitate the inclusion of all stakeholders in the knowledge exchange process	- ENRD - EIP-AGRI - EIP-AGRI & ENRD
2. Improve policy quality	- Facilitate the exchange of expertise and good practice - Improve the quality of RDPs - Support the evaluation of RDPs	- EIP-AGRI &ENRD - ENRD - ENRD
3. Increase awareness	- Play a role in informing the broader public on the benefits of rural development policy	- ENRD[5]

The day-to-day work of the two European Rural Networks is supported by three Support Units. The work of the European Network for Rural Development is supported by the ENRD Contact Point (CP) and the ENRD European Evaluation Helpdesk for Rural Development (Evaluation Helpdesk). The EIP-AGRI Service Point (SP) is responsible for supporting the EIP-AGRI network.

The three support units have specific roles to play in animating and supporting the European Rural Networks:

> The ENRD CP supports the operation of the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD). It coordinates thematic and analytical work, facilitates networking and exchange, enhances the capacities of rural actors and communicates the work and voice of the network.

> The ENRD European Evaluation Helpdesk for Rural Development (Evaluation Helpdesk) provides specialist support to improve methods, tools, knowledge and understanding for evaluating RDPs.

> The EIP-AGRI Service Point engages in connecting people and facilitates innovation and knowledge sharing in the agricultural sector. It acts as a mediator within the EIP-AGRI network, enhancing communication and cooperation between people with an interest in innovating agriculture: farmers, researchers, advisers, businesses, environmental groups, consumer interest groups and other NGOs.

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[5] Even though EIP-AGRI has not been assigned responsibility in the Strategic Framework for the furthering of objective 3 'Increase awareness', it contributes to it. The results on this objective are presented for EIP-AGRI in subsequent tables.

3. Self-assessment of the European Rural Networks

Self-assessment of the European Rural Networks is a process, which permits the networks to assess their own operations on an ongoing basis, with the aim of drawing lessons, continuously adapting their rolling work plan and improving their activities. The aim is to self-assess the progress towards the objectives agreed in the strategic framework of the EU Rural Networks.

The self-assessment is informed by output and result indicators related to the EU Rural Networks' Strategic Framework.[6] The majority of these indicators are derived through the work of - and provided by - the three support units of the Rural Networks (ENRD Contact Point, ENRD Evaluation Helpdesk, and the EIP-AGRI Service Point). Notwithstanding, it is important to note that the self-assessment exercise is not intended to provide a judgement on the three support units.

The self-assessment is an exercise carried out by the Rural Networks Steering Group, whose task is to assess, on an ongoing basis, the effectiveness and efficiency of the activities of the ENRD and of the EIP-AGRI network. As part of this process, the Assembly assesses the activities of the network with regard to the objectives set up in Articles 52(2) and 53(2) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 and the tasks listed in Articles 52(3) and 53(3) of this Regulation.

Self-assessment of the EU Rural Networks was conducted for the first time in 2017.[7] The 2019 self-assessment process builds on this experience, and as such, this report contains cumulative data from the beginning of the programming period until mid-2019.

Process of self-assessment of the EU Rural Networks

The self-assessment process started in spring 2019 at the request of the EU RN Assembly[8]. The cumulative values of the output and result indicators outlined in the strategic framework of the EU Rural Networks were collected from the Support Units during summer 2019. The indicator values cover the period from 2014 to mid-2019. This information helps to put in context the work carried out by the EU Rural Networks.

The self-assessment was also informed by an online survey to organisations taking part in the EU Rural Networks' governance bodies and subgroups. Afterwards, the EU RN Steering Group discussed the output and result level findings in its 12th meeting in October 2019 and provided reflections for improvements. Finally, the EU RN Assembly validated and complemented Steering Group reflections in its 6th meeting in December 2019 (see chapter 5).

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[6] List of indicators linked to the EU Rural Networks' Strategic Framework at
https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/enrd/files/sg5_rn_strategic_framework_final.pdf
[7] EU Rural Networks' Self-assessment 2017 https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/enrd/files/eurn_sa_consolidated-report_en.pdf
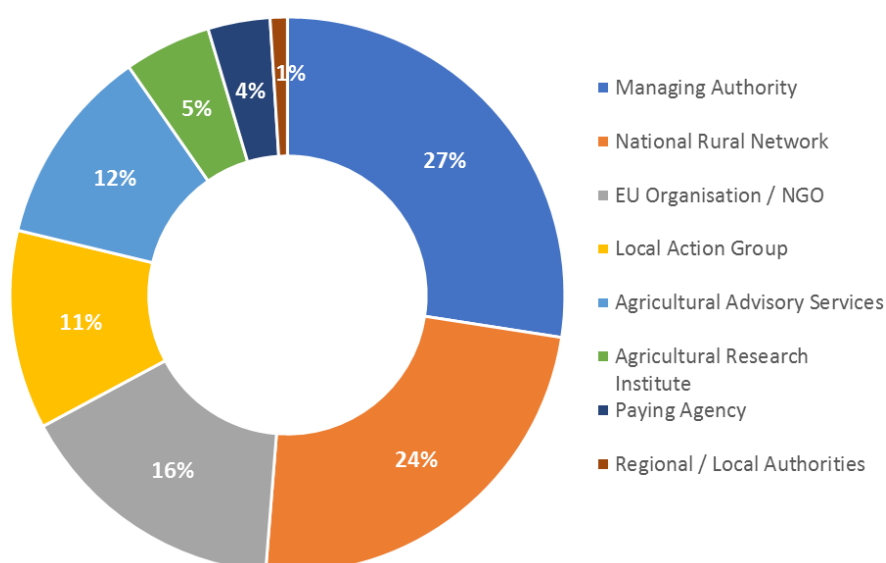[8] In its 5th meeting of December 2018 the Assembly confirmed the interest in repeating the self-assessment exercise in a lighter format.

Self-assesment survey

The online self-assessment survey was conducted between 13 June and 1 August 2019. The respondents were the members of the Rural Networks' Assembly and its two permanent subgroups (the LEADER/CLLD Subgroup and the Subgroup on Innovation for agricultural productivity and sustainability) as well as the Expert Group on Monitoring and Evaluating the CAP (Grexe). The aim of the questionnaire was to provide an understanding of the achievements of the EU Networks in terms of results. The self-assessment survey was structured largely according to the logic of the EU Rural Networks Strategic Framework.

A total of 139 respondents from all 28 EU Member States answered the survey, covering all categories of rural development (RD) stakeholders involved in the EU Rural Network (RN) Assembly. The number of respondents to the 2019 self-assessment survey was slightly smaller than in the 2017 survey, which had 156 respondents from 28 Member States. Figure 1 illustrates the proportion of answers by type of RD stakeholder. Among the responding organisations, around two thirds were involved in either the EU RN Assembly, Steering Group, Subgroup on Innovation, Subgroup on LEADER, or Grexe. One third of the responding organisations took part in between two and five of these bodies. Around two thirds of the responding organisations are members of the Rural Networks' Assembly and around a quarter are members of the Rural Networks' Steering Group or the LEADER Sub-group. One in five respondents takes part in the Subgroup on Innovation and one in ten are members of the Grexe.

Figure 1 : *Proportion of answers by RD stakeholder type*

Main results at a glance

Respondents to the questionnaire answered most of the questions relevant for them by indicating one of the following options: 1- Strongly agree, 2- Agree, 3-Neutral, 4- Disagree, 5- Strongly disagree. Most

of the percentages provided in this document refer to the aggregation of the answers received in the categories 'strongly agree' and 'agree'. The following table provides at a glance the main results which are presented and further elaborated in this document.

Table 1 : *Main results of the EU RN self-assessment*

General Objective (GO)	Main survey outcomes
GO1: ENHANCE PARTICIPATION	• ENRD activities led to a greater involvement of various stakeholders in rural development and the activities address stakeholder needs (71%). • Respondent's knowledge and capacities to implement rural development policy improved due to EU Rural Networks' activities (73% for ENRD activities and 63% for EIP-AGRI activities). • 62% of the respondents confirmed that the EIP-AGRI Network has succeeded in establishing a dialogue between farmers and the research community and that the EIP-AGRI Network activities helped to launch research activities based on farmer/forester needs (57%). • 65% of the respondents reported using and sharing the ENRD Good Practices and EIP-AGRI Inspirational Ideas, mainly via e-mail, website, newsletters, social media, events and workshops.
GO2: IMPROVE POLICY QUALITY	• The majority of the respondents (78%) stated that the general ENRD activities helped to improve policy quality. • The activities of the EU Rural Networks facilitated the exchange of expertise and good practices, especially the general ENRD activities (88%) and the EIP-AGRI activities (79%). • Respondents confirmed that the ENRD evaluation-related activities supported the evaluation of RDPs and build evaluation capacity (58%) and 67% of the respondents who participate in the Expert Group on Monitoring and Evaluating the CAP (Grexe) confirmed that ENRD evaluation activities successfully build evaluation capacity.
GO3: INCREASE AWARENESS	• 81% of the respondents confirmed that ENRD activities increased awareness of the benefits of rural development policy. • The majority of respondents confirmed that the ENRD website (75%) and EIP-AGRI website (72%) helped to increase awareness about the benefits of rural development policy. • The ENRD (79%) and EIP-AGRI (71%) publications helped to increase awareness about the benefits of rural development policy. • Approximately half of the respondents stated that the ENRD and EIP-AGRI social media channels helped to increase awareness about the benefits of rural development policy.

4. Outputs and results of the implementation of the strategic framework of the European Rural Networks

Slightly less than half (47%) of the survey respondents considered the collaboration between the ENRD and EIP-AGRI networks to be complementary and synergetic while about a quarter of the respondents (27%) answered 'neutral'. The NRN respondents had the most positive view of the collaboration (60%) whereas the Managing Authority (MA) and Local Action Groups (LAGs) respondents had the most negative views on it. The overall share of people who saw the networks as being complementary and

having synergy has increased slightly (43% in 2017), and the proportion of neutral respondents has decreased since the last self-assessment survey in 2017. The comments point towards a need for increased communication, coordination and collaboration. Organising joint events, regular thematic working groups, or a common activity plan might be useful to avoid overlaps. Some commentators suggested combining the networks into one European Rural Network in the future, whereas others favoured keeping the networks separate due to their different target groups.

The importance of deciding the role of the ENRD for the next programming period, both in terms of competences as well as type and scope of activities, was mentioned in the open comments section of the survey. The structure of the future CAP Strategic Framework might require rural networking to change to include both CAP pillars. On the one hand some respondents saw it as challenging to involve agricultural stakeholders, while on the other hand, some respondents called for closer attention to non-agricultural rural stakeholders, who they suggest may currently be underrepresented in the EU RN structures and activities.

General objective 1: Enhance participation

The ENRD and EIP-AGRI networks aim to enhance participation by assessing stakeholder needs, organising events tailored to stakeholders, producing and disseminating information, as well as through networking with and amongst rural development stakeholders. ENRD activities relating to this general objective focus on the implementation of rural development policy while the EIP-AGRI network concentrates on strengthening the links between farmers and the research community to foster innovation.

Increase involvement of stakeholders in the implementation of rural development

The ENRD aims to improve the understanding of the RD stakeholders and their needs, as well as increasing their involvement in the implementation of rural development policy. Increasing stakeholder involvement in the implementation of rural development policy has been achieved through capacity building and thematic events and also through ENRD publications. The events organised by the ENRD included a conference, workshops, NRN meetings and thematic seminars, which involved a total of 6 455 participants (an increase of 3 230 since 2017). The number and share of type of participants in the ENRD events has remained relatively stable for the entire programming period. Table 2 presents the different types of events implemented in the period 2014-mid-July 2019:

Table 2: ENRD CP events to increase stakeholder involvement in the implementation of rural development

Type of event/meetings	Number	Increase since last EU RN Self-assessment
ENRD workshops & conferences	39	13
NRN meetings	14	6
Thematic Working Group meetings	37	14
Thematic seminars	5	1

Capacity Building events

The ENRD CP organised 39 workshops and a conference for different target audiences. A total of 2 846 people participated in the ENRD workshops (an increase of 1 310 since since the last Self-assessment exercise). The workshop and conference themes focused mainly on RDP implementation, LEADER and exchange between National Rural Networks. The following table outlines the specific topics addressed:

Table 3 : Topics of the ENRD CP capacity building events

CAPACITY BUILDING EVENTS		
RDP IMPLEMENTATION	**LEADER**	**NRNs**
1. Simplified Cost Options (SCOs) (Feb, 2015); 2. Reasonableness of Costs and Public Procurement, (Mar, 2015); 3. Results-based Agri-environment Payments for Biodiversity (RBAPS), (Apr, 2015); 4. Agri-environment-climate Measures (AECM), (Dec, 2016); 5. Unlocking the Potential of the RDPs, (Feb, 2016); 6. 'Financing opportunities for projects - the Investment Plan for Europe' (Feb, 2016); 7. Selection criteria (Mar, 2016); 8. EFSI-EAFRD complementarity and investment platforms (Apr, 2016); 9. Measure 16 'Cooperation', (Jun, 2016); 10. Areas Facing Natural or Other Specific Constraints (ANCs), (Oct, 2016); 11. Generational Renewal through Rural Development (Jan, 2017) 12. Social Hubs in Europe (Feb, 2017); 13. Farm resilience (Mar, 2017) 14. Natura 2000 (Sept, 2017) 15. 'The Future CAP: towards a Performance-based Delivery Model' (Jan, 2018) 16. 'Improving Rural Policy Delivery: the Regional Dimension' (Feb, 2018) 17. 'Addressing Bottlenecks in RDP Implementation and Preparing for the Performance Review' (June, 2018) 18. 'Key Steps for CAP Strategic Planning' (Oct, 2018) 19. 'Biodiversity & the CAP: Working Together to Reach Conservation Goals' (Jan, 2019) 20. Attracting Young Farmers and Entrepreneurs in Rural Areas (Feb, 2019) 21. networX (April, 2019) 22. Pathways to farm competitiveness through the CAP (Jun, 2019)	23. LEADER/CLLD Conference on Cooperation (Sep, 2015); 24. Simplified Cost Options in LEADER/CLLD (Jan, 2016); 25. Umbrella Projects in LEADER/CLLD' (Feb, 2016); 26. LEADER/CLLD and Networking in support of Social Inclusion (Mar, 2016) 27. LEADER Cooperation, (Jun, 2016); 28. Achieving Results the CLLD Way: Putting the Method to Work, (Dec, 2016); 29. LEADER innovation (Feb, 2017) 30. LEADER/CLLD implementation through practitioner-led work (Jun, 2017) 31. LEADER Innovation (Nov, 2017) 32. LEADER Simplification (Feb, 2018) 33. 'LEADER: Acting Locally in a Changing World' (Oct, 2018) 34. 'Simplified Cost Options: experience gained and new opportunities' (June, 2019)	35. Networking for innovation under Measure 16 in RDPs (Oct, 2015); 36. NSUs in Member States with regional RDPs (May, 2016); 37. Regional and local networking (May, 2017) 38. NRN Communication (June, 2018) 39. 'Project Examples and Good Practices: Approaches to Collection and Dissemination' (Nov, 2018)

The largest event of the period organised by the ENRD was networX, organised in April 2019, which marked ten years of EU rural networking. It showcased the added value of networking in the design and implementation of rural development policy, as well as the role of networking for innovation in agriculture and forestry and in supporting evaluation. It involved more than 450 participants from all across the EU and promoted joint involvement/activities by stakeholders (e.g. groups of NRNs and organisations with common stands). This conference successfully enhanced the skills and knowledge of the participants (with a score of 3.1 out 4[9]).

National Rural Network (NRN) meetings

The ENRD organised 14 NRN meetings, hosted by different Member State NRNs (Latvia, Italy, Slovenia, the Netherlands, Slovakia, Portugal, Finland, Cyprus, Germany, Czech Republic, Estonia, Ireland, and Romania). The aim of the NRN meetings is to bring together the Member State NRNs and their Network Support Units (NSUs) to build NRN capacities, discuss common issues and learn from each other. Some examples of topics discussed in NRN meetings included efficient cooperation between NRNs and the ENRD CP, strengthening NRN capacity to support LEADER/CLLD, thematic networking activities, arts and culture initiatives in rural development, network governance, farm advisory services, putting the Cork Action Plan into practice, Smart Villages and supply chains, stakeholder engagement and generational renewal, among others. The fourteen NRN meetings had 881 attendees mainly from the Network Support Units of the NRNs, who are the key target of such events. The average number of participants and the number of participating MS has remained at 62 and 21 on average respectively throughout the programming period.

Thematic Events

Between 2014 and mid-2019, the ENRD CP thematic strands of work were divided into five main headings (i- RDP implementation; ii- Stakeholder involvement; iii- Smart and competitive rural areas; iv- Greening the rural economy; v- Social inclusion and demographic change, including a focus on young people and generational renewal). Work under these themes can take different forms, including the creation of Thematic Working Groups with key rural development stakeholders, the organisation of seminars and workshops, and the production of thematic publications and other information material.

In particular, the ENRD CP set up nine Thematic Working Groups (TWGs). These groups enable the exchange of information on specific issues and the drafting of recommendations on best practices. The TWGs are composed of representatives of research, stakeholders, Managing Authorities, Paying Agencies, NSUs and the European Commission.

Each ENRD CP TWG typically has three meetings and a final seminar. The outputs produced

Topics of the ENRD CP Thematic Working Groups

1. RDP implementation, (Jul-2014-Jul2015)
2. Stakeholder involvement, (Jul-2014-Jul2015)

Smart and competitive rural areas

3. Supply Chains, (Jul-2015-Jul2016)
4. Smart Rural Businesses, (Jul-2016-Jul2017)
5. Smart Villages, (Jul-2017-Jul2019)

Greening the Rural Economy

6. Transition to the green economy (Jul-2015-Jul2016)
7. Resource efficiency, (Jul-2016-Jul2017)
8. Water and Soil Management (Jul-2017-Jul2018)
9. Bioeconomy (Jul-2018-Jul2019)

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[9] The scale ranges from 1 (poor) to 4 (excellent).

customarily include a final report, RDP implementation analysis, case studies, articles and publications. The level of interest and commitment from RD stakeholders in the TWG has remained high, also shown by the fact that there has been continuation in the thematic focus of the work since 2017, particularly on Smart Villages and Greening the rural economy.

Dedicated workshops are implemented under the thematic strand on social inclusion and demographic change. Between 2017 and mid 2019 there have been four workshops implemented with an average of 73 participants.

Publications

The ENRD CP developed specific publications to further communicate relevant rural development information to rural stakeholders. In this respect, the ENRD CP has published 10 editions of the Rural Review, 10 editions of the Rural Connections magazine and nine editions of the ENRD Project Brochure. The topics included in the Rural Review included networking, bioeconomy, Smart Villages, resource efficiency and improving stakeholder involvement. The Rural Connections magazines featured articles focussed on networking, communication, generational renewal, rural proofing, social inclusion, the Cork 2.0 conference, LEADER cooperation and RDP implementation. The topics have evolved as the programming period has progressed and focus on issues that have been of interest of rural development stakeholders. Since the last self-assessment exercise, publications have focussed on key thematic fields such as bioeconomy, resource efficiency, generational renewal, social inclusion, Smart Villages and networking.

Figure 2: List of ENRD Publications

ENRD Rural Review

1. Issue 28 – Bioeconomy
2. Issue 27 – Networking
3. Issue 26 – Smart Villages: Revitalising Rural Services
4. Issue 25 – Resource Efficiency
5. Issue 24 – Re.imagining Rural Business Opportunities
6. Issue 23 - Green Economy - Opportunities for Rural Europe;
7. Issue 22 - Smart and competitive food and drink supply chains
8. Issue 21 - Rural Responses to Challenges in Europe
9. Issue 20 - Getting Rural Development Programmes Going
10. Issue 19 - Improving Stakeholder Involvement

ENRD Rural Connections

1. Spring 2019 networX
2. Autumn 2018 communication
3. Spring 2018 Generational renewal
4. Autumn 2017 Rural proofing
5. Spring 2017 – Social Inclusion
6. Autumn 2016 – Cork 2.0
7. Spring 2016 - LEADER Cooperation
8. Autumn 2015 - Communicating the RDPs
9. Summer 2015 - RDP Implementation
10. Spring 2015 - Stakeholder Involvement

ENRD Projects Brochure

1. Bioeconomy
2. Youth and Generational Renewal
3. Digital and Social Innovation in Rural Services
4. Resource-efficient Rural Economies
5. Supporting Rural Business
6. Transition to Greener Rural Economies
7. Migrant and Refugee Integration
8. Smart and Competitive Rural Areas
9. Rural Development Priorities 2014-2020

Increasing stakeholder capacity for meaningful involvement

In addition, the ENRD aimed 'to increase stakeholder capacity for meaningful involvement' by establishing through the ENRD CP nine Thematic Working Groups and implementing specific events with

targeted stakeholders (described above under the previous sub-heading). The usefulness of these event outcomes remain good (rate over 3- Good[10]) (see results section below).

Results

Nearly three out of four respondents (71%) confirmed that the ENRD activities lead to a greater involvement of various stakeholders in rural development. The rate was similar in the 2017 RN self-assessment survey (74%). The increasing involvement of stakeholders differed slightly amongst the largest respondent groups: 86% of the MA and 82% of the NRN respondents stated that the ENRD activities led to a greater involvement of stakeholders, 75% of LAGs and 77% of NGOs said the same.

Suggestions for increasing the involvement of stakeholders include translation of key documents, more joint activities between different stakeholders (e.g. MAs, beneficiaries), specific events for Paying Agencies and LAGs only, stakeholder meetings in geographic clusters (e.g. LAG meetings), more non-Brussels based thematic meetings, and encouraging the creation of thematic networks at European level.

The majority (73 %) of the responding organisations confirmed that their knowledge and capacities on implementation of rural development policy has improved as a result of the ENRD activities. The rate was similar to the last self-assessment survey in 2017 (72%). The views of the largest groups of respondents varied somewhat, from 66% of the MA to 79% of the NRN respondents. The online materials, seminars, workshops, and publications were considered very useful, as well as the shared good practices.

The result indicator 'usefulness of the event's outcomes' measures the results of the ENRD CP activities relating to stakeholder involvement in the implementation of rural development. Data for this indicator is gathered from participants through post-event feedback forms. The outcomes of the NRN meetings, ENRD CP workshops, Thematic Working Groups (TWG) and seminars were all rated as good by the participants (range 3.0 – 3.4[11]) from 2014 until July 2019. The rates have remained at a same level since the previous self-assessment exercise in 2017.

Establish a dialogue between farmers and research community

The EIP-AGRI Network aims to foster innovation through thematic work, networking and publications. To this end, 38 Focus Groups, 23 workshops and nine seminars on specific innovation topics were organised. The number of Focus Groups has increased by 13, workshops by five, and seminars by two since October 2017.

The EIP-AGRI Focus Groups are temporary groups of selected experts focusing on a specific subject, sharing knowledge and experience. Each group takes stock of the state of the art of practice and research in the field of the focus group activity, identifies research needs, highlights priorities for innovative actions and suggests further steps. The EIP-AGRI Focus Groups have covered topics such as agroforestry,

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[10] The scale ranges from 1 (poor) to 4 (excellent).
[11] The scale ranges from 1 (poor) to 4 (excellent).

benchmarking farm performance, diseases and pests in viticulture, fertiliser efficiency, forest biomass, High Nature Value farming, mixed farming systems, nutrient recycling, organic farming, precision farming, protein crops, short food supply chains, and soil-borne diseases. Each EIP-AGRI Focus Group meets twice and produces a recommendations and outcomes report.

The EIP-AGRI Network workshop and seminar topics included circular bioeconomy, Agriculture Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS), protein crops, biosecurity, bio-based economy, circular economy, knowledge systems, data revolution, cities and food, and multiple forest value chains.

Table 4 : *EIP-AGRI Network workshops establishing dialogue between farmers and research community*

Workshop	Title	Date	Location
Workshop 07	How to make protein crops profitable in the EU?'	26-27/11/2014	Budapest, Hungary
Workshop 08	Interactive workshop on biosecurity in the EU	22-23/01/2015	Brussels, Belgium
Workshop 09	Building new biomass supply chains for the bio-based economy'	27-28/05/15	Alghero, Italy
Workshop 10	Opportunities for Agriculture and Forestry in the Circular Economy'	28-29/10/15	Naantali, Finland
Workshop 12	Cities and Food – Connecting Consumers and Producers'	21-22/09/2016	Krakow, Poland
Workshop 14	'New value chains from multifunctional forests'	10-11/11/2016	Vienna, Austria
Workshop 15	Tools for environmental farm performance	07-08/02/2017	Zagreb, Croatia
Workshop 16	Data Sharing: ensuring a fair sharing of digitisation benefits in agriculture'	04-05/04/2017	Bratislava, Slovakia
Workshop 17	Organic is operational: linking EIP-AGRI Operational Groups in organic farming'	14-15/06/2017	Hamburg, Germany
Workshop 18	Digitising rural economies	11-12/10/2017	Lisbon, Portugal
Workshop 19	Networking Operational Groups on Supply chains issues	6-7/2/2018	France
Workshop 20	Enabling farmers for the digital age: the role of AKIS	26-27/4/2018	Latvia
Workshop 21	Connecting innovative projects: Water & Agriculture	30-31/5/2018	Spain
Workshop 22	Opportunities for farm diversification in the circular bioeconomy	6-7/2/2019	Vilnius, Lithuania
Workshop 23	Cropping for the future: networking for crop rotation and crop diversification	4-5/6/2019	Netherlands

Since 2014, the EIP-AGRI Network has published approximately 950 website news items, 44 brochures, 47 technical factsheets and 86 reports (including reports of Focus Groups, technical workshops and seminars). Furthermore, the EIP-AGRI Network has conducted a total of 141 missions and taken part in

108 networking activities. Since the last RN self-assessment exercise in 2017, the number of website news items has increased by about 150, brochures by 20, technical factsheets by 26, and reports by 46.

Results

The EIP-AGRI Network has succeeded in establishing a dialogue between farmers and the research community, confirmed by almost two-thirds of all the respondents (62%) and 74% of those respondents who are members of the Innovation Subgroup. The rate for all respondents was the same in 2017, but the rate for the Innovation Subgroup members has decreased by 11 percentage points (85% in 2017). The NGO respondents were the most positive (86%), whereas the LAG (50%) and NRN (50%) respondents had the most negative views on the issue.

Several commentators stated their satisfaction with the EIP-AGRI work. However, a greater involvement of farmers in the network activities is outlined as key to ensure that the EIP-AGRI activities focus on the real needs of farmers. Several comments indicated that although the cooperation between researchers and farmers has improved, there is a need to support and facilitate the national level networks and networking, for instance through NRNs, advisory organisations, or farmers' organisations. Also, several commentators called for a stronger focus on a multi-actor approach and the involvement of wider civil society in the EIP-AGRI work.

Facilitate the inclusion of all stakeholders in the knowledge exchange process

The EIP-AGRI Network addressed the objective 'knowing how innovation works' by setting up knowledge exchange tools such as 38 Focus Groups, 23 workshops, nine seminars, 444 publications and 34 collaborative areas, as well as through its website. The networking activities organised by EIP-AGRI had a total of 5 921 participants (an increase of 3 255 since 2017). Between 2017 to 2019, almost half of the participants in the networking activities were researchers (46%), 14% farmers and foresters, and 17% were advisors.

Table 5: EIP-AGRI Network workshops facilitating inclusion of all stakeholders in the knowledge exchange process

Workshop	Title	Date	Location
Workshop 01	The first call of Horizon 2020	14/01/2014	Brussels, Belgium
Regional Workshop 02	Regional Workshop on "Establishing Operational Groups under Rural Development Programmes"	26-27/02/2014	Lisbon, Portugal
Regional Workshop 03	Regional Workshop on "Establishing Operational Groups under Rural Development Programmes"	25-26/03/2014	Ljubljana, Slovenia
Regional Workshop 04	Regional Workshop on "Establishing Operational Groups under Rural Development Programmes"	02-03/04/2014	Tallinn, Estonia
Regional Workshop 05	Regional Workshop on "Establishing Operational Groups under Rural Development Programmes"	06-07/05/2014	Prague, Czech Republic
Regional Workshop 06	Regional Workshop on "Establishing Operational Groups under Rural Development Programmes"	21-22/05/2014	Paris, France

| Workshop 11 | Operational Groups: first experiences | 20-21/04/2016 | Legnaro, Italy |
| Workshop 13 | EIP-AGRI Networking and Communication | 04-05/10/2016 | Budapest, Hungary |

Table 6: EIP-AGRI Network seminars facilitating inclusion of all stakeholders in the knowledge exchange process

Seminar	Title	Date	Location
Seminar 01	Programming innovation - How to use the Rural Development Toolkit most effectively for the implementation of the EIP	26-27/06/2013	Madrid, Spain
Seminar 02	Programming Innovation in Rural Development - Linking Innovation and Science	25-26/11/2013	Berlin, Germany
Seminar 03	Launching Operational Groups and EIP Networking in Rural Development Programmes	18-19/11/2014	Brussels, Belgium
Seminar 04	Promoting creativity and learning through agricultural knowledge systems and interactive innovation	03-04/12/2015	Dublin, Ireland
Seminar 05	'Data revolution: emerging new business models in the agri-food sector'	22-23/06/2016	Sofia, Bulgaria
Seminar 06	Moving EIP-AGRI forward	10-11/05/2017	Athens, Greece
Seminar 07	Digital Innovation Hubs: mainstreaming digital agriculture	01-02/06/2017	Kilkenny, Ireland
Seminar 08	From Operation Group project to impact	17-18/10/2018	Umbria, Italy
Seminar 09	Multi-level strategies for digitising agriculture and rural areas	12-13/12/2018	Antwerp, Belgium

The EIP-AGRI Network has addressed the objective 'connecting partners' through its publications and by contributing to events organised by other stakeholders (figures above in section 'Establish a dialogue between farmers and research community'). In addition, the EIP-AGRI Service Point has created a Linkedin group dedicated to partners' search for H2020 projects. This group has approximately 2 400 members.

The EIP-AGRI Network has also supported the objective 'cooperating efficiently' through communication actions. EIP-AGRI received 3 600 retweets and there were 4 525 registered users on the EIP-AGRI website. The number of website visits was 343 191, and the number of downloads was 123 765. The EIP-AGRI Service Point LinkedIn page has 2 776 connections. The EIP-AGRI newsletter had a total of 7 643 recipients in 2019. According to the EIP-AGRI communication survey, almost all of the 392 respondents (97%) consider the quality of the newsletter good, very good or excellent. The quality of the website was considered good or very good by 86% of the respondents.

Results

More than half of the EU Rural Networks' self-assessment survey respondents (57%) and 70% of the respondents taking part in the Innovation Subgroup stated that the EIP-AGRI network activities contribute to the launch of research activities based on farmer/forester needs. The rate for all respondents was around the one reported in 2017 (62%), but the rate for the Innovation Subgroup members has decreased by 14 percentage points. The respondents representing advisory services and research (83%) had the most positive views on EIP-AGRI's contribution to launching research activities based on farmer/forester needs, whilst LAG respondents (43%) had the least positive view on the issue. The respondents commented on the need to involve the farmers more effectively in the identification of research needs, e.g. through farmer-researcher roundtables. Furthermore, respondents called for the increased involvement of innovation brokers and NRNs in EIP-AGRI's work, as well as an increased role for thematic networks. Furthermore, several respondents mentioned a need for a more transparent selection process for the topics of focus groups.

General objective 2: Improve policy quality

The ENRD and EIP-AGRI network aim to improve the quality of rural development policy through networking and exchange of knowledge and best practices amongst rural development stakeholders, organising events tailored to different themes and stakeholders, producing and disseminating information and publications, as well as by supporting the evaluation capacity of rural development stakeholders.

The ENRD has been successful in improving rural development policy quality, according to 77% of the survey respondents. The MA respondents (82%) were the most positive about issue. The other large respondent groups (LAG, NRN, NGOs and research & advisory services) had relatively similar views (71% -74%). Respondents also found the analyses and studies created by the ENRD useful. Thematic Groups were mentioned as useful opportunities for sharing experiences and networking in order to increase knowledge and capacity. Respondents valued the use of participative methods in ENRD activities as they promote learning from others.

Facilitate the exchange of expertise and good practice

The EIP-AGRI Network has focussed on using 'diffusing innovations, projects and practices' through the collection and dissemination of 975 Inspirational Ideas and by organising 28 events (20 workshops and eight seminars) and the database on Operational Groups. Since the last RN self-assessment exercise, 587 inspirational ideas have been developed and two workshops and one seminar have been held. Furthermore, six issues of the annual Agrinnovation magazine have been published between 2014 - 2019.

The translation and diffusion of EIP-AGRI materials plays an important role in the diffusion of innovation. A total of 2 225 items have been translated, out of which 929 were articles, two magazines, 48 different
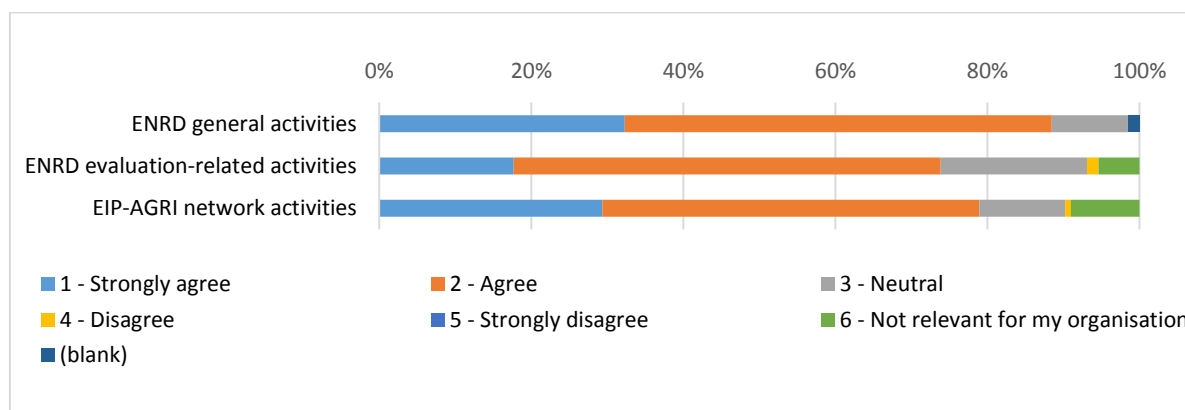
brochures, 27 infographics, 50 factsheets and one video. The newsletter is also distributed in French, and some have been translated into Romanian, Hungarian, Slovak and Estonian.

The ENRD CP project database showcases best practice and successful RDP projects from different Member States. A total of 450 project examples have been collected and disseminated, 225 more than in 2017. The ENRD CP also produces project brochures that focus of EAFRD funded projects around specific thematic areas and for further dissemination. Since the last RN self-assessment exercise in 2017, the projects brochures focussed on Smart Villages, resource efficiency, bioeconomy, youth and generational renewal.
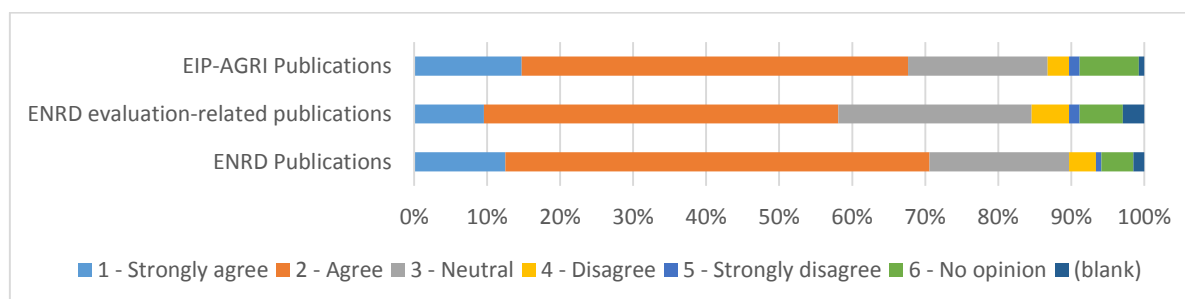
Results

The majority of the survey respondents stated that the activities of the EU Rural Networks facilitate the exchange of expertise and good practice, especially the general ENRD (88%) and the EIP-AGRI (79%) ones, which remain high as in the previous RN self-assessment survey (89% and 85% respectively). The NRN respondents had the most positive views (94% for the general ENRD and 91% for EIP-AGRI), followed by NGOs (86% and 82% respectively). The LAG respondents were overwhelmingly positive about the general ENRD (100%) and around two thirds of the MA respondents stated that that EU Rural Networks facilitate the exchange of expertise and good practice (73% for the general ENRD and 68% for EIP-AGRI). The specific activities promoting exchange mentioned in the comments were ENRD website, working groups and events. Nevertheless, more communication and further shared good practices were called for.

Figure 3: The activities of the EU Rural Networks facilitate the exchange of expertise and good practice

Information produced by the EU Rural Networks is widely used and shared. Around two thirds of the participants reported using and sharing information produced by the ENRD CP (71%) and EIP-AGRI Service Point (68%) as in the previous RN self-assessment survey in 2017. The most common methods of dissemination were emails, websites, social media, newsletters, events and meetings. Several respondents also mentioned the need for translating the European-level materials into their national languages in order to reach local stakeholders.

Figure 4: Using and sharing the good practices disseminated by the EU Rural Networks

Improve quality of Rural Development Programmes (RDPs)

The ENRD has addressed the objective 'increase awareness of the opportunities and needs for improving RDPs'. By 2017, the ENRD had screened 116 RDPs, collecting and disseminating information from all the programmes, and producing 140 Summary Fiches related to the Partnership Agreements (34 fiches) and RDPs (116 fiches). In addition, the ENRD had produced 18 reports on RDP measures and sub-measures, 18 summary reports on Focus Areas, and six summaries on priorities. Furthermore, the ENRD has written 10 reports covering the sub-measure of the Cooperation Measure (M16) and six reports on the way in which various RDP measures contribute to environmental and climate change objectives (M1, M2, M4, M10, M11 and M12), screened RDP amendments, developed case studies on input reduction practices and policies and conducted a comprehensive overview on NRNs planned activities and achievements. This work is in line with the operational objective: 'identifying promising approaches at EU level'. In other policy areas, the ENRD produced 32 NRN profiles, 34 LEADER cooperation factsheets, and 12 monitoring indicator fiches covering the implementation period of the rural development policy until 2017.

The number of NRN profiles has increased by seven, LEADER Cooperation Factsheets by three, and monitoring indicator fiches by four since 2017. The ENRD also mobilised and supported LAGs to input 3 096 entries in the LAG database. Furthermore, the work and analysis carried out and outputs developed from the 95 events/meetings (41 events/meetings since 2017), in particular the 39 capacity building events, helped to improve the quality of the RDPs.

The ENRD has also developed several online tools which have been made available for sharing information and knowledge. The project database showcases best practice and successful RDP projects from different Member States (450 examples of EAFRD supported projects have been collected and disseminated, 225 more than in 2017). The LAG database contains the basic information and contact details of the Local Action Groups around Europe. The CLLD partner search tool is the marketplace for LAGs to find partners for their proposed transnational projects. A total of 209 partner searches have been published in the tool, which is 156 more than in 2017. The NRN toolkit is intended to assist Network Support Units to achieve the key NRN objectives and tasks. The resources largely build on existing NRN experience and include methodological good practices, relevant documents and outputs from events, and articles in ENRD publications. Finally, the LEADER toolkit is one of the most visited parts of the ENRD

website, providing information to all actors implementing the LEADER approach at Managing Authority level, as well as the local level.

'Consolidating and developing communities of practice for improving RDPs' has been achieved through the organisation of events and producing publications (see general objective 1 Increase involvement of stakeholders). In addition, the 450 ENRD project examples contribute to the objective.

The ENRD website has been a key tool for 'informing better RD policy'. The ENRD website (excluding the evaluation section) has had 8 645 web-updates, which has an increase of 4 287 since 2017.

Results

The results were similar to those in 2017, 73% of the respondents confirmed that the ENRD CP activities have improved the knowledge and capacities of their own organisations and those of stakeholders with regard to RDP implementation. The NRN (79%) and LAG respondents (75%) held the most positive views about the improvements.

Support the evaluation of RDPs

The ENRD aims to improve the evaluation of EU rural development policy. It therefore supports the Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development, Member States and other evaluation stakeholders in meeting the objectives of the Common Monitoring and Evaluation System (CMES), and facilitates networking between stakeholders to help meet this objective. The ENRD supports RDP evaluation by drafting common guidelines, providing thematic evaluation-related training and workshops, through publications and by providing other technical support related to RDP evaluation.

ENRD activity focussing on evaluation has helped 'improve the evaluation capacity of all actors involved in RDP evaluation' by processing and answering 252 evaluation-related queries, publishing six evaluation guidelines and four working documents and by organising 17 thematic working group meetings under seven Thematic Working Groups. The number of guidelines has increased by three, working documents by two, and Thematic Working Group meetings by seven since 2017. The published working documents focused amongst other things on evaluation-related queries and HNV farming monitoring and assessment.

Published evaluation guidelines

Establishing and Implementing the Evaluation Plan of 2014-2020 RDPs

Evaluation of National Rural Networks 2014-2020

Assessment of RDP Results: How to Prepare for Reporting on Evaluation in 2017

Evaluation of LEADER/CLLD

Evaluation of Innovation in Rural Development Programmes 2014-2020'

Assessing RDP Achievements and Impacts in 2019

Thematic Working Groups

1.'Assessment of RDP results: how to prepare for reporting on evaluation in 2017'
2.'Evaluation of National Rural Networks 2014-2020'
3.'Evaluation of LEADER/CLLD'
4.'Evaluation of Innovation in RDPs 2014-2020'
5.'Reporting on RDP Achievements and Impacts in 2019'
6.'Data for the assessment of RDP achievements and impacts'
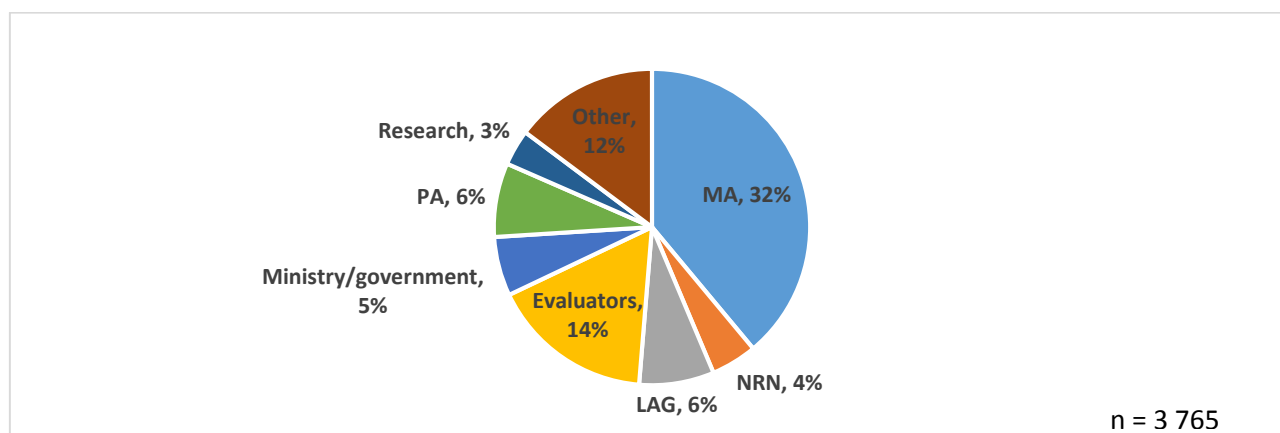7."Preparing for the ex ante evaluation of the CAP Strategic Plan" (ongoing)

ENRD activity with a focus on evaluation addressed the objective 'consolidating and developing communities of practice' by organising 136 capacity building events, which is 70 more than in 2017. Out of these events, 10 were transnational Good Practice Workshops focussing on a specific theme (see table 7) and 113 were yearly capacity-building events in the Member States called EvaluationWORKS!. There were also nine other capacity building events at the national level. The topics of the EvaluationWORKS! capacity building events included the Common Monitoring and Evaluation System (CMES), Evaluation of LEADER/CLLD, 'Setting up the system to answer evaluation question', 'Getting prepared for reporting on evaluation in the AIR submitted in 2017', and 'Evaluation of RDP results and impacts in 2019'. In addition, the DG AGRI Desk Officers have received four training sessions.

Table 7: *Evaluation Helpdesk Good Practice Workshops*

Good Practice Workshop topics	Time, place
Assessing Environmental Effect of Rural Development Programmes: Practical solutions for the ex post evaluation 2007-2013	October 2015, Vilnius, Lithuania
Preparing the assessment of High Nature Value Farming in Rural Development Programmes 2014-20: Practices and solutions	June 2016, Bonn, Germany
Methods for assessing impacts of Rural Development Programmes 2007-13: Practices and solutions for the ex post evaluation	July 2016, Palermo, Italy
Targeted data management for evidence-based evaluation of Rural Development Programmes 2014-2020	December 2016, Bordeaux, France
How to report on evaluation in the Annual Implementation Reports: experiences and outlook	September 2017, Riga, Latvia
National Rural Networks' support to the evaluation of RDPs	December 2017, Athens, Greece
Showing the added value of LEADER/CLLD through evaluation	May 2018, Helsinki, Finland
Approaches to assess socio-economic and sector related RDP impacts in 2019	October 2018, Warsaw, Poland
Approaches to assess environmental RDP impacts in 2019	December 2018, Bratislava, Slovakia
Getting prepared for the ex-ante evaluation of the CAP Strategic Plan	March 2019, Brussels, Belgium

The capacity building events had 3 765 participants in total, which is 2 148 more than in 2017. As seen in Figure 6 below, approximately a third (32%) of the participants were from Managing Authorities and 14% were evaluators. Since 2017, the share of MA and ministry/government participants has decreased slightly whereas the share of other, Paying Agencies, evaluators and others has somewhat increased.

Figure 5: Participants in all capacity building events organised by the Evaluation Helpdesk in 2014 – Q2 2019

The ten thematic Good Practice Workshops had a total of 643 participants. 38% of the participants represented the Managing Authorities and 22% were evaluators.

The yearly capacity building events (EvaluationWORKS!) are organised annually in each Member State. The events are facilitated in local language by the Evaluation Helpdesk geographical experts, and the material is prepared by the Evaluation Helpdesk and approved by the Commission. These yearly capacity building events had a total of 2 286 participants. 44% represent the Managing Authorities, 10% Local Action Groups, 16% evaluators and 9% Paying Agencies.

Furthermore, ENRD published 17 factsheets, which is six more than in 2017, showing Good Practices in the field of RDP impacts on animal welfare, ex post evaluations using matched panel data, LEADER/CLLD evaluation, NRN self-assessment and evaluation, evaluation of climate stability, of agri-environmental schemes and of HNV farming, and provided 67 evaluation-related contributions to events at EU and MS level.

ENRD Evaluation Helpdesk has contributed to the objective of 'informing rural development policy decision-making' through communication actions. The evaluation section of the ENRD website had 869 web-updates. By August 2019, the total number of newsletter recipients on the mailing list was 3 851. Twelve newsletters were distributed to over 40 000 readers.
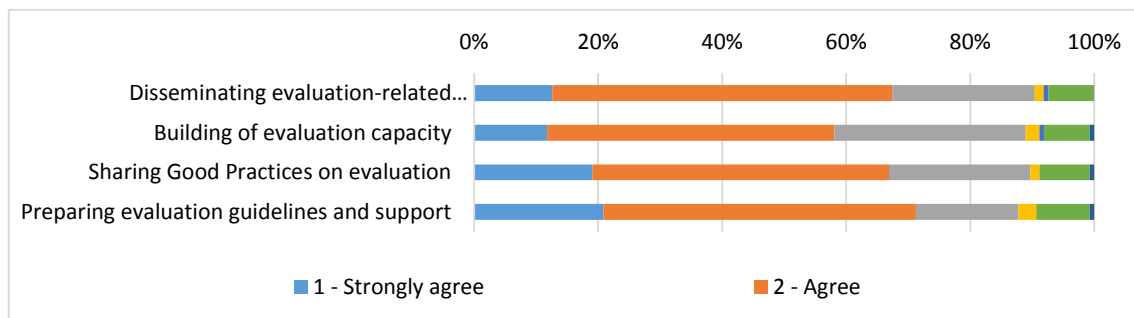
ENRD Evaluation Helpdesk produced 347 external communications (an increase of 90 since 2017) on publications, Good Practice workshops, trainings, yearly capacity building events, reports, training packets and external events. The e-alerts were received by 75 486 people. The guidance documents, working documents, factsheets and the newsletter are available for download from the evaluation section of the ENRD website. These documents were downloaded 18 605 times.

Results

According to regular ENRD evaluation communications surveys conducted since July 2017 (number of respondents was 223), most respondents had first come across the Rural Evaluation News in an ENRD evaluation-related event, and subsequently, most respondents read it online. A third of the respondents

confirmed reading each issue of the newsletter, another third when topics of interest were covered. The most common reasons for reading the newsletter were to learn about the ENRD evaluation activities and to learn about evaluation.

Figure 6 : The ENRD evaluation-related activities contribute to supporting the evaluation of RDPs

Two-thirds of survey respondents confirm that ENRD evaluation-related activities support the evaluation of RDPs. Fifty-eight percent of the survey respondents and 67% of the respondents who participate in the Expert Group for Monitoring and Evaluating the CAP (Grexe) confirmed that ENRD evaluation activities successfully build evaluation capacity. A total of 86% of the MA respondents saw the preparation of evaluation guidelines and support contribute to supporting the evaluation of RDPs. The respondents cited the publications and the Good Practice Workshops as particularly useful in understanding the logic of RDP interventions and to better prepare programming and evaluation of the RDP. According to the respondents, evaluation-related needs to be addressed by the EU Rural Networks include more capacity building for evaluators and stakeholders, more workshops, as well as continued dissemination of Good Practices and examples of evaluation methods. Furthermore, more guidance on qualitative evaluations, added value of networks and stronger focus on economic and social impacts, as well as more focussed guidelines on indicators were also suggested. The respondents also proposed the development of guidelines for dissemination to different target groups.

The results of ENRD evaluation activity are measured through the result indicator '% of increase of knowledge due to Evaluation Helpdesk capacity building event attended (before and after the single event)'. The data for this indicator is gathered from the participants through post-event feedback forms. The indicator is calculated as a percentage difference between the participants' reported level of knowledge before the event and after the event. The participants' level of knowledge has increased in every capacity building event organised by the Evaluation Helpdesk during the programming period. The participants reported an increase in their level of knowledge (self-reported knowledge level before the event and after the event on scale 1 to 4). The figures in the table below show a weighted average of the change in the level of knowledge of the participants before and after different types of capacity-building events organised by the Evaluation Helpdesk.

Table 8: *Increase in the participants' knowledge due to capacity building event attended*

Event(s)	% of increase in the participants' knowledge due to capacity building event attended
10 Good Practice workshops	31.55%
Two desk officer trainings	59.64%
EvaluationWORKS! 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018	25.37%

General objective 3: Increase awareness

The ENRD aims to increase awareness by producing and disseminating publications, collecting and disseminating best practice, as well as through communication actions. These actions played a role in informing the broader public of the benefits of rural development policy

Play a role in informing the broader public on the benefits of rural development policy

The ENRD has promoted the objective 'communicating the benefits of RD policy' publishing 58 newsletters, nine project brochures and one promotional brochure. The ENRD website (excluding the evaluation section) had 8 645 web-updates. By mid-2019, the total number of subscribers to the ENRD newsletter was 7 332. The Contact Point developed and communicated 450 Good Practice examples. Twenty-five of these were finalists in the first edition of the Rural Inspiration Awards presented during the networX conference in April 2019. This resulted in six winners, one under each of the identified categories[12]. This conference raised awareness about outstanding rural development initiatives and engaged a wide range of stakeholders from across the EU. In particular, there was a 'people's vote' category for rural stakeholders from around the EU to select their favourite project. More than 8 200 people voted in this process.

Results

The majority of the respondents (81%) confirmed that the activities of the ENRD help to increase awareness about the benefits of the EU's rural development policy. The NGO respondents (87%) were the most positive about the ENRD increasing awareness, closely followed by NRNs (72%) and MAs (75%). Some commentators noted, however, that the activities are of interest to the national level and that the broader public is not necessarily aware of the actions of the ENRD.

The ENRD has 'disseminated and shared the knowledge generated by the Networks' by publishing 833 Facebook posts and 4 275 tweets, as well as conducting 714 missions and responding to 1 163 infoline enquiries.

The website has been one of the key tools for informing the broader public. In fact, the majority of respondents (75%) confirmed that the ENRD website played a role in increasing awareness about the benefits of rural development policy (five percentage points more than in 2017). Similarly, respondents

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[12] https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/news/rural-inspiration-awards-meet-winners-0_en

confirmed the importance of the EIP-AGRI website (72%) in informing the broader public (nine percentage points more than in 2017).
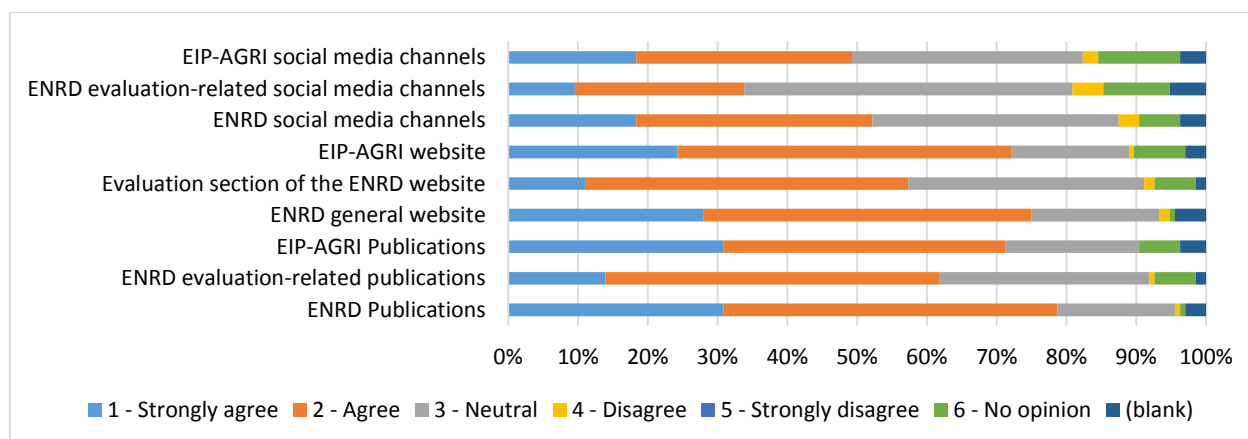
In addition, website statistics show the extent to which the website and its information are being used. From July 2017 to June 2019, there were 1 509 490 page views and 493 848 unique visitors to the ENRD website (with nearly 165 000 unique visitors per year on average), and a total of 171 366 downloads of documents and information during this period. The EIP website had 343 191 visits and 123 756 downloads during the same period. Also, there are 4 525 registered users of the EIP website.

From 2014 to mid-2019 the number of tweets from the ENRD was 4 275. The number of re-tweets of EIP-AGRI was 3 600. Social media channels were considered less important than the website and publications in in raising awareness, however, 50% of respondents said they felt it did have a role.

By mid-2019, the total number of subscribers to the ENRD newsletter was 7 332 (1 020 subscribers more than in 2017) and to the EIP-AGRI newsletter was 14 672 (8 528 more subscribers than in 2017).

Respondents stated that the general ENRD and EIP-AGRI publications help to increase awareness about the benefits of rural development policy (79% and 71% respectively).

Figure 7: The communication tools and channels of the EU Rural Networks help to increase awareness about the benefits of the rural development policy

5. Reflections for improvements

This section outlines the main reflections of the EU Rural Networks' Steering Group[13] and the Assembly[14] on the output and result data[15] and the results of the self-assessment survey of the EU Rural Networks. Three themed groups ('Enhance participation', 'Improve policy quality', and 'Increase awareness') were organised in the Steering Group and Assembly meetings to discuss the main findings and remaining questions linked to each general objective of the EU RN Strategic Framework[16].

General objective 1: Enhance participation

Results from the Survey

- ENRD activities led to a greater involvement of stakeholders in rural development and addressed stakeholder needs. Yet, respondents outlined the importance of finding the balance between targeting events to mixed groups of stakeholders (e.g. MAs, beneficiaries, EC) and specific events for key actors such as Paying Agencies and LAGs. Respondents called for non-Brussels based, thematic-focussed and geographically clustered meetings.

- Knowledge and capacity to implement rural development policy improved due to EU Rural Networks' activities. In particular, the rural networks' websites, online materials, events, Good Practices and publications were considered very useful in helping to achieve this objective.

- The EIP-AGRI Network has succeeded in establishing a dialogue between farmers and the research community and helping to launch research activities based on farmer/forester needs. Respondents outlined the need to support and facilitate networking at national levels, strengthen the multi-actor approach and the involvement of wider civil society, National Rural Networks (NRNs), thematic networks and innovation brokers in EIP-AGRI work. In addition, respondents called for further exchanges between farmers and researchers for the identification of needs (e.g. by organising farmer-researcher roundtables).

Main reflections for improvements from the Steering Group and the Assembly

Improved targeting of events and information	Targeted events for specific audiences or topics could enhance the engagement of both existing and new stakeholders, and show the benefits of rural development and innovation. New stakeholders could include, among others: young people, the socially excluded, civil society and municipalities. Involvement of agricultural stakeholders dealing with the implementation of the EAGF aspects of CAP Strategic Plans (Pillar I) in networking activities is essential in the future. Participation can be improved by ensuring that the topic is relevant for the target group(s) identified for a certain networking

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[13] 12th [meeting](#) of the EU Rural Networks' Steering Group on 21 October 2019 in Brussels
[14] 6th [meeting](#) of the EU Rural Networks' Assembly on 16 December 2019 in Brussels
[15] The data was provided by the ENRD Contact Point, ENRD Evaluation Helpdesk, and the EIP-AGRI Service Point.
[16] The Strategic Framework of the European Rural Networks,
https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/enrd/files/sg7_strategic-assessment-framework.pdf

activity. Identifying specific topics and developing more detailed agendas for events can help participants to better assess the relevance of their involvement. Similarly, more targeted and shorter publications would improve their usefulness to stakeholders. Current EIP Focus Groups were mentioned as a good practice both at EU and national level: by mobilising new actors in specific working areas, they lead to greater stakeholder involvement and enlarge the networks stakeholders' basis.

Fostering thematic networks	Collaborative work and synergies with various/different sectors and initiatives should be encouraged by focussing on common issues, thematic areas and geographic clusters, ensuring also inclusive rural networking by embracing all relevant socio-economic and environmental stakeholders. This can include involving stakeholders in the process of preparing tenders, and in more bottom-up based work programmes. In the thematic networks, the EU Rural Networks could take the role of a facilitator which supports communication and interaction between different stakeholders, particularly through participative and innovative techniques. There should be demand-driven events for different stakeholders, but it is also important to have thematic groups that crossing different aspects of CAP support that have complementary aims, particularly support for the CAP's climate and environmental objectives. In general, it is important to identify topics that are important for the stakeholders of both pillars.
Support free exchange and build trust between different actors	Introducing Chatham House rules - where information disclosed may be reported, but the attribution of that information is not explicitly or implicitly identified - in events, where appropriate, may encourage improved interaction and exchange by giving participants the confidence to give personal feedback, and enabling the involvement of those who are less familiar with rural development. Building trust between pillar 1 and pillar 2 actors is important for the future of CAP and rural networking, helping all stakeholders to adequately understand each other's roles, goals and perspectives throughout the programme lifecycle.
Forstering interactive methods and digital participation	Interactive seminars and meetings, where the working methods are tailored to the objectives and topics, should be encouraged. For some events and meetings, it would be good to arrange webinars or other types of online participation as the use of communication technologies and techniques can increase the outreach and positive impact of the CAP, and allow for improved thematic targeting. This included calls for greater use of Member States languages, multimedia technology, online meetings and in-country satellite events.

General objective 2: Improve policy quality

Results from the Survey

- ENRD activities helped to improve policy quality. In particular, the analyses and studies developed by the ENRD and the thematic groups were considered useful. The use of participative methods in ENRD activities was particularly appreciated.

- The activities of the EU Rural Networks facilitated the exchange of expertise and good practices. The ENRD website, working groups and events were identified as useful channels for dissemination, while more communication and further shared good practices were called for.

- The ENRD evaluation-related activities supported the evaluation of RDPs and built evaluation capacity. Publications and the Good Practice Workshops were identified as particularly useful. Suggested future activities included more capacity building and workshops targeting evaluators, the continued dissemination of good practices in evaluation methods and the development of targeted guidelines for different stakeholder groups.

Main reflections for improvements from the Steering Group and the Assembly

Capitalising on the neutrality and reach of the Networks	The neutrality and diversity of the ENRD and EIP-Agri Networks allow them to be used as platform for discussing issues related to rural development policy as well as research and innovation policy. The networks are open spaces for dialogue where different interests come together and different parties can learn from each other. It is important to share good practices (project outcomes, programme management, policy quality, and evaluation) throughout the programme lifecycle for all CAP objectives, including relevant practices from other EU or national funds. Networks have a strong potential to collect out-of-the box ideas arising from different sources such as H2020 and Interreg, discuss them and co-create relevant policy recommendations with key stakeholders. Networks are therefore in a suitable position to act as mediators of policy exchanges. Furthermore, Networks can take two distinct roles in these processes: they can simply reach out and support existing initiatives which bring together different stakeholders or they can take a more proactive role and stimulate new linkages.
Improve relevance and uptake of policy recommendations drawn up from the Networks	There are several ways of enhancing the relevance and uptake of policy recommendation from the Networks: a) deepening the work and focus on specific topics with key stakeholders - e.g. on specific measures/interventions, LEADER, EIP-AGRI Operational Groups, Simplified Cost Options (SCOs); b) addressing broader issues which interest and attract a wider variety of different groups (e.g. climate change, or social inclusion);

	c) Incorporating evaluation results more systematically into networking events and outputs, more capacity building for evaluators and other stakeholders, and enhanced networking for evaluations.
Include flexibility in Network's action plans to allow them to adapt	Rather than planning and timetabling all Network activities in detail, some degree of flexibility and space should be allowed in the planning to allow for rapid responses to unforeseen issues and events. Some budgetary flexibility in the Networks can be allowed to support new initiatives regarding emerging topics.

General objective 3: Increase awareness

Results from the Survey

- ENRD activities increased awareness of the benefits of rural development policy. Activities were considered to be of interest to national level stakeholders but not neccesarily to the broader public.

- The ENRD and EIP-AGRI website and publications have played a key role in the communication of the benefits of rural development policy. Social media channels also contributed, but to a lesser extent in comparison to the website and publications as the stakeholders were less aware of them.

Main reflections for improvements from the Steering Group and the Assembly

Sufficient resources for communication activities	A more interactive approach, which encourages discussion, could be taken on social media. This is resource intensive, therefore EU RN Support Units, as well as the NRNs will require sufficient resources for this.
Informing about the benefits of networking for rural development policy	A prominent part of Networks' communication activities focus on informing stakeholders about upcoming activities or materials produced. There is a gap in demonstrating the benefits of EU-level networking for rural development policy stakeholders and communicating these widely. Events such as the Rural Inspiration Awards ceremony, where rural actors from different European countries come together and show pride in their projects and work, are excellent for raising awareness of the positive developments in rural areas amongst target groups.
More targeted information	Streamlining communication through a filtering and identification of relevant content by topic (e.g. carried out by NRNs if resources allow) is advised to avoid overwhelming stakeholders with too much information (e.g. dedicate specific tags to articles or Twitter handles to reach targeted stakeholders). It is important to find out what kind of information the stakeholders are interested in, engage them actively and make the best use of communication technologies and techniques to increase the outreach of the Networks' information.

Development of communication tools to enhance engagement	Several tools for improving communication were mentioned, e.g. a 'have your say' box on the Support Units' websites, key word tagging for the website, translating extracts of reports, a specific mobile event application which permits networking and facilitates the exchange of information, as well as webinars and farminars. Also, open brainstorming of ideas and issues enhances bottom-up engagement of different stakeholders. Alongside newer tools, the continuing value of face-to-face networking possibilities were also highlighted.
Communication as a Network activity	The communication activities of the EU Rural Networks can be enhanced through exchanges with the national actors (e.g. NRNs), who can use their communication networks to distribute the information. These actors should be used as multipliers for disseminating information. Co-creation of information by national and EU actors should also be strengthened – the national organisations are more likely to pass on the information on if they had a role in its creation. By working together, the EU level information can also be tailored to fit the national level information needs.

ANNEX 1: EU Rural Networks' self-assessment survey questionnaire

1. Background information

A drop-down menu will open for each item in bullet points.

- Member State:

- Respondent information
  - Name – Last name:
  - Email:
  - Name of the organisation/institution:

- Organisation type / Stakeholder Group (select one option):
  - Managing Authority (MA) ☐
  - National Rural Network (NRN) ☐
  - Paying agency (PA) ☐
  - Local Action Group (LAG) ☐
  - EU Organisations / NGOs ☐
  - Regional/Local Authorities organisations ☐
  - Agricultural Advisory Services ☐
  - Agricultural Research Institutes ☐
  - Evaluators ☐

- Membership (Multiple answers possible)
  - Member of RN Assembly ☐
  - Member of RN Steering Group ☐
  - Member of the Leader Sub-group ☐
  - Member of the Subgroup on Innovation ☐
  - Member of the Expert Group on Monitoring and Evaluating the CAP (Grexe) ☐

- Do you deal in your daily work with: (Multiple answers possible)
  - RDP implementation
  - RDP monitoring
  - RDP evaluation
  - Innovation in agriculture and forestry
  - Leader/CLLD
  - Other (please specify)

2. Strategic Framework general objective 1: Enhance participation

6. The ENRD lead to a greater involvement of my organisation/institution/stakeholders in rural development						
Select one option	**1** Strongly agree ☐	**2** Agree ☐	**3** Neutral ☐	**4** Disagree ☐	**5** Strongly disagree ☐	**6** Not relevant for my organisation ☐

Please, list ideas to improve different stakeholders' (farmers, advisors, rural businesses, evaluators, administration, LAGs, researchers etc.) involvement through network activities (free text in English:

7. My organisation / institution / stakeholders uses and shares the good practices (GPs) /EIP-AGRI inspirational ideas disseminated by the EU Rural Networks17						
Select one option	**1** Strongly agree	**2** Agree	**3** Neutral	**4** Disagree	**5** Strongly disagree	**6** Not relevant for my organisation
ENRD general GPs	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
ENRD evaluation-related GPs	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
EIP-AGRI GPs	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please, list ideas to improve the usefulness of Good Practices/EIP-AGRI inspirational ideas (*free text in English*):

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[17] This question on GPs also refers to GO2: Improve policy quality.

8. The EIP-AGRI network activities support the dialogue between farmers and the research community						
Select one option	**1** Strongly agree ☐	**2** Agree ☐	**3** Neutral ☐	**4** Disagree ☐	**5** Strongly disagree ☐	**6** Not relevant for my organisation ☐

Comments (free text in English)*:*

9. The EIP-AGRI network activities contribute to launch research activities based on farmer'/ foresters' needs						
Select one option	**1** Strongly agree ☐	**2** Agree ☐	**3** Neutral ☐	**4** Disagree ☐	**5** Strongly disagree ☐	**6** Not relevant for my organisation ☐

Please, list ideas / activities to boost research activities based on farmer'/foresters' needs through networking (free text in English)*:*

3. Strategic Framework general objective 2: Improve policy quality

10. The activities of the ENRD help to improve policy quality						
Select one option	**1** Strongly agree ☐	**2** Agree ☐	**3** Neutral ☐	**4** Disagree ☐	**5** Strongly disagree ☐	**6** Not relevant for my organisation ☐

Comments (*free text in English*):

11. My organisation's / institution's /stakeholders' knowledge and capacities on implementation/evaluation of rural development policy has/have improved as a result of the EU Rural Networks' activities						
Select one option	**1** Strongly agree	**2** Agree	**3** Neutral	**4** Disagree	**5** Strongly disagree	**6** Not relevant for my organisation
ENRD general activities	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
ENRD evaluation-related activities	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
EIP-AGRI network activities	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please describe what kind of knowledge you have gained through EU Rural Networks' activities and list specific networking activities that contributed the most to improve your knowledge and capacities on implementation of rural development policy (free text in English) :

12. The activities of the EU Rural Networks facilitate the exchange of expertise and good practice						
Select one option	**1** Strongly agree	**2** Agree	**3** Neutral	**4** Disagree	**5** Strongly disagree	**6** Not relevant for my organisation
ENRD general activities	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
ENRD evaluation-related activities	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
EIP-AGRI activities	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Comments (*free text in English*)

13. The ENRD evaluation-related activities contribute to supporting the evaluation of RDPs						
Select one option	**1** Strongly agree	**2** Agree	**3** Neutral	**4** Disagree	**5** Strongly disagree	**6** Not relevant for my organisation
Preparing evaluation guidelines and support	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Sharing Good Practices on evaluation	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Building of evaluation capacity	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Disseminating evaluation-related information	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please, list evaluation-related needs to be addressed by the EU Rural Networks (free text in English)

4. Strategic Framework general objective 3: Increase awareness

14. The activities of the ENRD help to increase awareness about the benefits of the rural development policy						
Select one option	**1** Strongly agree ☐	**2** Agree ☐	**3** Neutral ☐	**4** Disagree ☐	**5** Strongly disagree ☐	**6** Not relevant for my organisation ☐

Comments (*free text in English*):

15. The communication tools and channels of the EU Rural Networks help to increase awareness about the benefits of the rural development policy						
Select one option	**1** Strongly agree	**2** Agree	**3** Neutral	**4** Disagree	**5** Strongly disagree	**6** Not relevant for my organisation
ENRD Publications	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
ENRD evaluation-related publications	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
EIP-AGRI Publications	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
ENRD general website	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Evaluation section of the ENRD website	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
EIP-AGRI website	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
ENRD social media channels	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
ENRD evaluation-related social media channels	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
EIP-AGRI social media channels	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
16. How do you disseminate the information produced by the EU Rural Networks?						

5. Collaboration between the EU Rural Networks

17. The collaboration between the ENRD and EIP-AGRI Networks is complementary and synergetic						
Select one option	**1** Strongly agree	**2** Agree	**3** Neutral	**4** Disagree	**5** Strongly disagree	**6** No opinion
	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please, indicate specific suggestions (e.g. topics, tools, working methods) on how the collaboration between the EU Rural Networks could be enhanced in the current programming period (free text in English):

18. Further comments related to EU Rural Networks

(free text in English):

ANNEX 2: EIP-AGRI Focus Groups

EIP-AGRI Focus Groups state of play October 2019

		Main question	State of play
1	**Organic farming** - Optimising arable yields	Why do yields vary so much between organic farms; how can this yield gap be minimised?	**Final report** **Factsheet** **Brochure**
2	**Protein crops**	What does the feed sector need in terms of protein? Why is EU farming not able to deliver? Why is EU farming in protein crops not competitive? How can this be remedied?	**Final report** **Factsheet** **Brochure**
3	**Animal husbandry** - Reducing antibiotic use in pig farming	How to enhance animal health and welfare to reduce the need for antibiotics? What are the alternatives to antibiotics? How to change human habits, attitudes and behaviour in order to reduce the use of antibiotics in livestock production?	**Final report** **Factsheet** **Brochure**
4	**Genetic resources** - Cooperation models	What are the bottlenecks that limit cooperation between the different types of stakeholders? How can cooperation between the different types of stakeholders be promoted?	**Final report** **Factsheet** **Brochure**
5	**Soil organic matter** content in Mediterranean regions	How can we improve soil organic matter content in the Mediterranean region in a cost-effective way? What new solutions for securing soil functionality and soil fertility can be proposed in this regard?	**Final report** **Factsheet** **Brochure***
6	**IPM for Brassica**	What cost-effective IPM solutions are there for Brassica? What other solutions can be proposed?	**Final report** **Factsheet** **Brochure**
7	**High Nature Value** - Farming profitability	How to make HNV farming more profitable without losing the HNV characteristics?	**Final report** **Factsheet**
8	Mainstreaming **precision farming**	How to organise the data capture and processing to mainstream the application of precision farming for an optimisation of inputs and yield?	**Final report** **Factsheet**
9	Profitability of **permanent grassland**	How to manage permanent grassland in a way that combines profitability, carbon sequestration and biodiversity?	**Final report** **Factsheet**
10	**Fertiliser efficiency** - Focus on horticulture in open field	How to use innovative fertilisation and nutrient recycling to solve the conflict between the need for crop fertilisation and legislative requirements regarding water quality?	**Final report** **Factsheet**
11	Optimising profitability of crop production through **Ecological Focus Areas**	How can EFAs, more specifically landscape features and buffer strips and their management, contribute to the profitability of crop production?	**Final report** **Factsheet**
12	Innovative **short food supply chain** management	How to stimulate growth of short food supply chains in Europe, both in terms of numbers of producers involved and volumes traded, to increase farm income?	**Final report** **Factsheet**
13	IPM practices for **soil-borne diseases**	How to suppress soil-borne diseases (fungi and nematodes) in vegetables and arable crops and how to enhance cross-fertilisation between different crops and agricultural systems?	**Final report** **Factsheet** **Brochure***
14	**New entrants into farming**	Which patterns characterise new entrants in farming and what can be learnt from them to foster innovation and entrepreneurship in agriculture?	**Final report** **Factsheets**
15	**Water & agriculture**	What farm level adaptation strategies exist or can be developed to deal with water scarcity?	**Final report** **Factsheet** **Brochure**

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EIP-AGRI Focus Group		Main question	State of play
16	**Mixed farming systems**: Livestock/cash crops	How to develop livestock / cash crop interactions and promote their benefits as a sustainable alternative to farm or territorial specialisation?	**Final report** **Factsheet**
17	**Benchmarking farm** productivity and sustainability performance	How can farmers and advisers use benchmarking data and process to improve productivity and sustainability performance?	**Final report** **Factsheet**
18	**Livestock emissions** - Reducing emissions from cattle farming	How to reduce cattle livestock emissions in a cost-effective way for farmers?	**Final report** **Factsheet**
19	**Nutrient recycling**	How to improve the agronomic use of recycled nutrients (N and P) from livestock manure and other organic sources?	**Final report** **Factsheet**
20	Sustainable mobilisation of **forest biomass**	How to improve the sustainable mobilisation of biomass from our forests in the EU?	**Final report** **Factsheet**
21	Robust and resilient **dairy production systems**	How to create good conditions for dairy cattle husbandry in different production systems?	**Final report** **Factsheet**
22	**Agroforestry**: introducing **woody vegetation** into specialised crop and livestock systems	How to develop agroforestry as a sustainable farming system which can boost agricultural productivity and profitability?	**Final report** **Factsheet**
23	**Diseases and pests in viticulture**	How can we increase resilience of grape vines to pests and diseases and support the productivity of the sector in sustainable ways?	**Final report** **Factsheet**
24	New **forest practices and** tools for adaptation and mitigation of **climate change**	Which new practices and tools can improve the climate mitigation and adaptation potential of EU forests?	**Final report** **Factsheet**
25	**Grazing for carbon**	How to increase the soil carbon content from grazing systems?	**Final report** **Factsheet**
26	**Carbon storage in arable farming**	Which cost-effective farm management practices and tools could foster and ensure long-lasting carbon storage in arable farming contributing to climate change mitigation?	**Final report** **Factsheet**
27	**Circular horticulture**	How to increase circularity in protected horticulture?	**Final report** **Factsheet**
28	Enhancing production and use of **renewable energy on the farm**	How to enhance production and use of renewable energy on the farm?	**Final report** **Factsheet**
29	**New feed for pigs and poultry**	Which are the promising new sources and strategies to reduce pressure on natural resources while feeding or producing feed for pigs and poultry?	**Ongoing** 2nd meeting held
30	Protecting fruit production from **frost damage**	How to protect fruit from frost damage?	**Ongoing** 2nd meeting held
31	**Reducing food loss on the farm**	Which new on-farm practices and technologies can limit food loss?	**Ongoing** 2nd meeting held
32	**Non-chemical weed management**	What are the options for non-chemical weed management in arable cropping systems?	**Ongoing** 2nd meeting held
33	**Pests and diseases of the olive tree**	How to increase the sustainability of olive growing, taking into account the risks brought by pests and diseases?	**Ongoing** 2nd meeting held
34	**Bee health and** sustainable **beekeeping**	How to ensure the sustainability of beekeeping in the face of challenges linked to pests and diseases, intensification of agriculture and climate change?	**Ongoing** 2nd meeting held
35	Diversification opportunities through **plant-based medicinal and cosmetic products**	How to create diversification opportunities for farmers through innovative value chains of plant-based medicinal and cosmetic products?	**Ongoing** 2nd meeting held
36	**Soil salinisation**	How to maintain agricultural productivity by preventing, reducing or adapting to soil salinity?	**Ongoing** 2nd meeting held
37	Protecting agricultural **soils** from **contamination**	How to prevent agricultural soil contamination and how to address the problem of contaminated soils?	**Ongoing** 2nd meeting 19-20 November
38	**Reducing antimicrobial use in poultry farming**	How to reduce the use of antimicrobial treatments in poultry in order to fight the spread of antimicrobial resistance?	**Ongoing** 2nd meeting 15-16 January

* The brochure 'Soil organic matter matters' covers topics from the 'Soil organic matter' and the 'Soil-borne diseases' Focus Groups.

Source: EIP-AGRI website, Focus Groups https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/en/focus-groups