Report of the 10ᵗʰ meeting of the European Rural Networks' Steering Group

Brussels, 22 October 2018

Morning session

Welcome and Introduction	
9.30 – 10.00 Welcome and Introduction **Mario Milouchev, DG AGRI**	The Chairman warmly welcomed the participants to the 10th Steering Group meeting, the second EU Rural Networks' governance meeting in 2018. The day provided, in particular, an opportunity to discuss the legal proposals for the CAP post-2020, with a focus on networking and innovation aspects and to prepare the upcoming 5th Rural Networks' Assembly, to take place in Brussels on 11th December.

CAP Legislative Framework	
10.00 – 11.45 State of play of discussions on the post-2020 CAP **Martin Scheele, DG AGRI** **Q&A**	Martin Scheele presented the Commission's proposal for the future CAP. The new proposal represents a shift from compliance-based assurance to a performance-based system, rendering the policy more targeted and less complex. Accordingly, the EU legal framework will have much less details, giving more room to subsidiarity. In their CAP Strategic Plans, Member States will design their interventions, foresee respective budgets, and set implementation targets, reflecting on the one hand identified needs on the ground and, on the other, the nine CAP specific objectives set out in the legal framework. Discussions of the proposal develop in a constructive manner and progress, particularly in the Council. The following Q&A session allowed clarification of some aspects of the proposal. Although the proposal speaks of 'national CAP plans', specific possibilities will be foreseen for regionalised Member States. While the evaluation of policies necessarily requires a longer time, annual monitoring of activities will allow to see how they feed into the long-term objectives of the national CAP plans. The issue of possible double funding or overlapping between ESIF interventions under separate programmes with LEADER/CLLD funding, particularly in regionalised states, will be addressed through the principle of complementarity, ensuring that all actions are complementary, regardless of the instrument funding them. The lead fund option for multi-fund LAGs was signalled.
Networking in the post-2020 CAP **Helen Williams, DG AGRI**	The Commission's proposal sees a reinforced need and role for networking in the post-2020 CAP. While there will be a high level of continuity in networks' key objectives and tasks, the most significant changes will concern the set-up of a single EU CAP network, replacing the current ENRD and EIP-AGRI networks, and national CAP networks for agriculture and rural development, replacing the current NRNs, plus the extension of the scope of networking to encompass both Pillars of the CAP. The governance model of the new EU-level network is still to be decided and stakeholders' views were invited.
Networking for innovation **Antonella Zona, DG AGRI**	The new CAP proposal aims to reinforce the innovation dimension of networking. The objective is to foster innovation and support the inclusion of all stakeholders in the knowledge-exchange and knowledge-building processes. The new CAP network will *inter alia* be a bridge between the CAP and the future Horizon Europe policy on

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	research. Together with advisory services and research networks, CAP networks will be one of the three pillars of the AKIS (Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems).
Q&A	The Q&A session permitted an exchange of views on networking aspects of the proposals. Some concerns were expressed on whether there would be sufficient funds available from EAFRD technical assistance for the future increased tasks of networks and on whether a good balance between agricultural/rural interests could be found in the new structure. It was noted that people need to feel more engaged in the governance of the networks – a useful reflection to define the governance model of the future CAP network. The Commission also stated that EIP-AGRI has been the most successful of the five European Innovation Partnerships and its activities will continue even when the EIP-AGRI network (which is only one of its strands) is merged into the future CAP network.
Planned Network Activities	
12.00 – 12.15 Planned Network Activities – Michael Gregory, ENRD Contact Point	Michael Gregory presented the work of the ENRD Contact Point (CP), particularly for the period 2018-19. The CP annual work plan is structured along six priorities. Three of them are related to capacity building and peer exchange and aim to support a more effective and simple programme implementation (e.g. through seminars on key steps to CAP strategic planning), strengthen NRNs and NSUs (e.g. through EU-wide NRN meetings) and improving and demonstrating the achievements of LEADER/CLLD (e.g. through LEADER-related events).

The other three are thematic priorities, dealt with through two specific thematic groups on Smart Villages and Mainstreaming the Bioeconomy and a thematic work strand on generational renewal.

Cross-cutting activities are the analysis of RDPs, the collection and sharing of good practices, network coordination and external communication through on and off-line channels.

The ENRD CP is organising a rural networking event in Brussels in April 2019 to mark ten years of rural networking. More details will be communicated soon. |
| 12.15 – 12.30 Planned Network Activities – Hannes Wimmer, ENRD Evaluation Helpdesk | Hannes Wimmer presented the Evaluation Helpdesk's three main strands of activities: providing guidance for evaluation, building the capacity of evaluation stakeholders and sharing knowledge. This includes organising thematic working groups, evaluation trainings in the Member States, good practice workshops and issuing on and off-line publications (newsletters and factsheets).

The participants of the meeting, and all evaluation stakeholders were invited to share their evaluation needs with the Helpdesk team at any time, so that they can develop their activities accordingly. |
| 12.30 – 12.45 Planned Network Activities – Véronique Reibholtz, | The EIP-AGRI Service Point's workplan 2018 is articulated around three priorities: fostering a thriving agricultural innovation system in the EU, promoting innovation in managing natural resources and improving farm resilience and strengthening agricultural value chains within a circular, decarbonised bio-economy. The Service Point organises workshops and focus groups around related topics. It is also carrying out an Assessment of the work of Operational Groups. To support it, an e-mail |

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EIP-AGRI Service Point Antonella Zona, DG AGRI	survey has been sent to the Member States, to better understand the actual implementation of EIP-AGRI Operational Group actions. A new Digitisation Toolbox is under development and will be available on the EIP-AGRI website. The sub-group on Innovation recently provided indications about the workplan of the EIP-AGRI network in 2019, including at least two new seminars, two workshops and five focus groups on specific topics. While some of these seem very technical, they generate widespread interest amongst innovation stakeholders. The EIP-AGRI network will also contribute to the rural networking event that will be organised in Brussels by the ENRD in April 2019.

Afternoon session

RNs' Assembly	
14.15 – 14.30 Assembly priorities, self-assessment and SG rotation Neda Skakelja, DG AGRI	The Chair opened the afternoon session, devoted to the preparation of the 5th Rural Networks' Assembly planned for 11 December in Brussels. The participants were invited to share their views on the first EU Rural Networks' Self-Assessment, conducted in 2017. He indicated that, in the Commission's view, self-assessment is a very important tool for the rural networks to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of their activities and to improve and adapt them on an ongoing basis to progress towards their objectives. As the Steering Group played a crucial role in developing and feeding into the intense self-assessment process, the Commission was eager to get their feedback on the exercise itself as well as their preliminary ideas for the next steps. The audience expressed a general agreement on the importance of self-assessment. One suggestion put forward was to publish the self-assessment report, to give all interested parties access to the same information. The Commission agreed to take account of this. A second issue raised was the reflection on the rotation exercise, already mentioned in previous Steering Group meetings. The Commission had received one query on the timing of the exercise and, after careful consideration, expressed the view that a rotation exercise should not take place at this stage as no strong opinions to the contrary were voiced by the Steering Group, and given the state of play of the discussions on the future.
14.30 – 15.00 Introduction to the working session David Lamb, ENRD CP	Participants were invited to discuss in detail the priority topics for the next Assembly in December. Some topics had been defined by the previous Steering Group meeting in May, but the participants also suggested new topics based on the morning's presentations around the future CAP proposal. The time available required the selection of priority topics for discussion, these were then prioritised by the participants in real time via Mentimeter. The following topics were selected: - the role of the future CAP networks and the role of networks in AKIS;

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- training for stakeholders concerning the future CAP indicators and monitoring systems; and

- EU-wide vision for generational renewal and enhancing rural attractiveness.

The participants then split in three working groups, each dealing with a specific topic.

Group Discussions	
15.10 – 16.30 Group discussion followed by Feedback from the Working Groups	*1. The role of the future CAP networks and the role of networks in AKIS* The Assembly should discuss the new skills, methods, tools and knowledge needed for the new CAP networks, both at MS and EU level. It should also discuss how best to maximise the added value of the networks in the new policy framework. Stakeholders will engage in a much bigger network under the new CAP, so they need new skills and knowledge. It will also be important to avoid repetition of information and to differentiate the network's composition and the way its work is conducted, involving new people. The right form of governance needs to be defined. Other topics to discuss concern the role of CAP networks within the AKIS also in relation with the focus of the AKIS now and in future. Finally, it is important to define the role of the networks in the transition period, building on the experience of past 10 years of rural networking. *2. Training for stakeholders concerning the future CAP indicators and monitoring systems* It is important to discuss this topic in the Assembly in order that steps can be taken through the networks to equip stakeholders in time for preparing the new programmes. The right stakeholders should be identified and involved. Stakeholders should understand and be well informed about the main indicators, how these are defined and how to set the targets for each indicator. Preparing IT systems for the new delivery system is time critical and is an essential early action. Networks have a vital role in facilitating exchanges including lessons learnt from the current period and preparing for the next period. This is not limited to training and may include seminars, workshops and peer-to-peer exchanges between stakeholders in the network including Paying Agencies and Managing Authorities. Mapping of data gaps and the solutions others have found to fill these would be valuable. All relevant stakeholders should be involved through a multi-level cascade approach – from the European level through the national, regional and local levels. A crucial consideration is how to empower stakeholders at each level to be an effective part of the monitoring process. *3. EU-wide vision for generational renewal and enhancing rural attractiveness*

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	This topic should be discussed in the Assembly as it is one of the specific objectives of the new CAP proposal and a widespread challenge for Member States, although priorities and issues vary in each context.
	The group discussed several good practices from different Member States which can inspire future action to address this topic. Many examples make use of new technologies and social media to set up advisory services for young farmers and entrants, support matchmaking and encourage peer-to-peer learning among young farmers. Overall, it is crucial to provide a basic infrastructure (e.g. social services) in rural areas, encouraging young people to stay and/or return. Supporting small enterprises outside the farming sector is also important.
	All rural stakeholders have a role to play to promote generational renewal and rural attractiveness. NRNs and the ENRD CP can disseminate good practices; the ENRD CP may foster peer-to-peer learning and exchange of good practices (e.g. via seminars). LAGs and LEADER supported projects, should continue in making rural areas more attractive.
Outlook
16.30 – 17.00 Report Back, Outlook and Closing Remarks Neda Skakelja, DG AGRI	The degree of interest and participation in the meeting showed that networking is an important topic for the December Assembly, particularly regarding the involvement of different stakeholders and the added value of networking.
	While there is a clear interest in discussing the future CAP, the discussion highlighted the importance of reflecting on, learning from, and building on what has been done so far. Self-assessment and peer-to-peer exchanges are crucial.
	The European Commission and the European Rural Networks will continue with the preparation of the Assembly, building on the suggestions of the Steering Group and using all possible opportunities to continue the exchange with all interested stakeholders. The Commission accepted the Steering Group's request for another presentation of the CAP proposal – with a specific focus on the new CAP network - and an update of the state of the discussions on the reform proposals to be included in the Assembly's agenda.

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