

**ENRD Network Support Unit (NSU)
Peer-to-Peer Training Programme**

**MODULE 6:
Networking for Innovation in the 2014-2020 RDPs**

18-19 March 2014, Ghent, Belgium



Notes and Observations

With special thanks to the Flemish Rural Network for their hospitality and generous support of this training event

What you will find in the following pages....

The following notes and observations are from a two day training workshop on “Networking and Innovation for Innovation in the 2014-2020 RDPs” that was hosted by the Flemish Rural Network in Ghent, Belgium, on 18-19 March 2014.

The [workshop](#) included a mixture of presentations and interactive discussions with an emphasis upon the exchange of knowledge and experience between participants leading to the identification of practical actions for Managing Authorities (MAs), National Rural Networks (NRNs) and other related stakeholders and interested parties

All supporting materials for the workshop can be found [here](#). The notes also contain direct links to specific presentations and resources where relevant. The notes are divided into 5 main sections:

[Getting Started](#) (page 2) – an introduction to the workshop.

[Setting the Scene](#) (page 3) – links to presentations from DG AGRI, the EIP-AGRI Service Point, ENRD Contact Point and the Flemish Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. These are useful for clarifying the anticipated / **intended role of networking in promoting and supporting innovation in the 2014-2020 RDPs**. Various **important learning points** from the subsequent questions and answer (Q&A) session are highlighted.

[Networking and Innovation – what do we know?](#) (page 4) – the outcomes of interactive discussions that provide a useful insight into current understanding of **how rural networks can promote and support a culture of innovation amongst rural stakeholders**. Discussions were focussed upon two key questions:

1. What **networking tools** can be used to promote and support innovation in rural development?
2. What **conditions and set up** are needed for NRNs / NSUs to efficiently and effectively promote and support innovation?

[Networking for Innovation in 2014-2020](#) (page 8) – the outcomes of three parallel workshops exploring the practical actions that NRNs / NSUs can undertake in order to promote and support a culture of innovation by amongst rural stakeholders. The workshop themes were:

- **Networking and innovation as a cross-cutting theme**
- **LEADER and innovation**
- **Role of NRNs in implementing the EIP-AGRI**

Under each workshop you will find links to presentations, reflections and lessons learnt from the presentations, plus practical actions to foster innovation that were identified for including in the annual work plans of NRNs.

[What do we need to make Networking for Innovation happen?](#) (page 12) – **short summaries from 8 open discussions** led by workshop participants on the following themes:

- Macro-regional aspects of fostering innovation
- How to foster innovation without using the word “innovation”?
- How do we make innovation PRACTICAL for end users (farmers, rural businesses)?
- How to make the best use of the regional workshops (2014) organised by the EIP Service Point?
- How can we map and assess innovation support services?
- How to gain the trust of farmers?
- How to ignite and create an active network?
- How to foster innovation with limited resources for NRNs / NSUs?

Getting Started

Welcome to the Notes and Observations from the sixth module of the ENRD network support unit (NSU) 'peer-to-peer' training programme. The 2 day training workshop was generously hosted by the Vlaams Ruraal Netwerk (Flemish Rural Network) in Ghent, Belgium, with the support and co-operation of the ENRD Contact Point and EIP-AGRI Service Point.

The theme of the training workshop was "Networking for Innovation in the 2014-2020 RDPs". Support for innovation has been a key priority for EU rural development for many years and the new EAFRD rural development regulation (No. 1305/2013) has further deeply embedded innovation within rural development policy by:

1. Introducing innovation as a cross-cutting objective that must be integrated into all priorities adopted by Member States in their RDPs;
2. Enshrining innovation within the "horizontal" Priority 1: Fostering knowledge transfer and innovation in agriculture, forestry, and rural areas;
3. Including rural development policy as a key tool for supporting the European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability (EIP-AGRI), and;
4. Introducing a new aim for networking by national rural networks (NRNs), namely to "*foster innovation in agriculture, food production, forestry and rural areas*", including the specific obligation to implement activities "*regarding the provision of networking for advisors and innovation support services*".

But what exactly does to "*foster innovation in agriculture, food production, forestry and rural areas*" mean? What are our expectations of networking for innovation? What about LEADER and innovation? Why do we need two European networks – the ENRD and EIP-AGRI network?

A total of [76 people from 23 Member States](#) gathered in Ghent to ask these and many more questions. They included representatives of network support units (NSUs), Managing Authorities (MAs), Paying Agencies, Local Action Groups (LAGs), farmers' organizations, advisory groups, NGOs and other public bodies – plus DG AGRI, the ENRD Contact Point and EIP-AGRI Service Point.

The overall aims of the workshop were to:

- a) build a **common understanding** of how NRNs can promote and support a culture of innovation amongst rural stakeholders in accordance with Art. 54 of EAFRD Regulation No. 1305/2013;
- b) **explore and clarify** how the ENRD, EIP-AGRI network and NRNs can most effectively work together in 2014-2020 to promote and support innovation;
- c) showcase some **existing relevant examples** of "networking for innovation";
- d) identify and discuss **specific activities** that can be included in the future annual work plans (AWPs) of NRNs for helping to promote and support innovation.

The workshop included a mixture of presentations and interactive discussions that combined guidance on key issues with creative and productive interaction between participants. It was intended that the participants would leave the workshop with a clearer understanding of:

- i) the relevant decisions that need to be made at national level regarding the programming and planning of "networking for innovation", and;
- ii) a range of practical actions that can be incorporated into the AWPs of the NRNs.

Setting the Scene

The training workshop began with a series of presentations, plus Questions and Answers to “set the scene” and help ensure a common baseline of understanding regarding the role networking in promoting and supporting innovation in the 2014-2020 RDPs.

[Innovation in EU Rural Development Policy 2014-2020](#) - a joint presentation from DG AGRI (Matthias Langemeyer and Iman Boot)

[Networking for Innovation: EIP-AGRI Service Point](#) – presented by Koen Desimpelaere

[Networking for Innovation: ENRD Contact Point](#) – presented by Michael Gregory

[Innovation Support Services in Flanders](#) – a presentation from the Flemish Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (Anne Vuylsteke)

Questions and Answers

This opening session generated many questions and comments from the participants! These were all collected and are summarised below:

- Can Local Action Groups (LAGs) be involved and how in the EIP-AGRI?
- There is plenty of existing knowledge regarding innovative new ideas - so the question is how to use / explore / search for already existing knowledge?
- What is the link between EIP-AGRI and Horizon 2020?
- What is the added value of having two networks rather than one?
- How can we achieve smooth co-operation between the NRNs and the EIP-AGRI / ENRD at EU level?
- What is the scope of the EIP-AGRI? Is it restricted only to agriculture?
- How to establish an Operational Group?
- For the selection of projects, how can you assess innovativeness?
- The EIP-AGRI is intended to be a bottom-up approach – who will communicate the relevant opportunities / services to those at the “bottom” e.g. farmers?
- How can NRNs help to engage farmers with the theme of innovation? For example, how can NRNs help farmers find their way through the EIP-AGRI?
- What scope is there for the EIP-AGRI to learn from NRNs (and vice versa) regarding different approaches for engaging with stakeholders?
- Is social / organisational innovation a topic for the EIP-AGRI? Or the ENRD?
- How will innovative ideas from farmers or researchers be “captured” and turned into projects for EIP-AGRI funding?
- What is the place of agricultural advisory services in the EIP-AGRI?
- Will already existing research organisations be eligible to participate in the EIP-AGRI?
- How will Operational Groups manage their budgets?
- How to quantify / qualify innovation?
- More information on the link between EIP-AGRI and Horizon 2020 would be very useful
- How and when will the EIP-AGRI Service Point effectively connect with the NRNs?
- How do the EIP-AGRI and ENRD link with the European Evaluation Network?
- Is it possible for all of the EU networks to use a shared translation service to help make information exchange easier?

Unfortunately it was not possible for all of the questions to be answered on-the-spot, but some specific **learning points** arising from the Q&A session were:

1. The European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural productivity and Sustainability (EIP-AGRI) works to foster competitive and sustainable farming **and** forestry that 'achieves more and better from less'. It contributes to ensuring a steady supply of food, feed and biomaterials, developing its work in harmony with the essential natural resources on which farming depends. Other innovation issues (like social innovation in rural communities) do not fall under the EIP-AGRI. Pillar 1 is also outside the scope of the EIP. However, it is important to be clear that the **role of the NRNs to “foster innovation”** is not limited to agriculture or supporting the EIP-AGRI. The role of the NRNs is much broader, including support to innovative actions under LEADER.
2. LEADER has traditionally been an incubator of innovation in rural areas. EIP-AGRI Operational Groups (OGs) are similar to LAGs in that they capture ideas from interested actors and foster the setting up of projects. **However, LAGs act on the basis of a comprehensive local development strategy related to a territory, whereas an OG builds itself around a concrete innovation project** targeted towards finding a solution for a specific issue within a specific timeframe (one problem, one solution, one group).
3. In theory, a LAG could initiate or help animate an OG if the LAG members have a joint interest in pursuing a specific issue and if the project objectives are in line with the aims of the EIP. Individual LAG members / actors can also be part of an OG and contribute their knowledge. LAGs can also support the provision of innovation support services and help to bring different actors together in an interactive innovation project.
4. The EIP-AGRI Service Point is developing a web-based platform that will contain information about the results of the work of as many OGs as possible. As the database grows, the knowledge base will grow. Although projects funded by Horizon 2020 are not obliged to report to the Service Point, the Service Point will collect the results of Horizon 2020 projects where possible.
5. Horizon 2020 is the largest source of public funding for research and innovation from the European Commission and has a budget of around 4 billion euro for the societal challenge 2 on “food security, sustainable agriculture and forestry, marine, maritime and inland water research and the bioeconomy.” Several topics under this challenge require a “multi-actor approach” which is compatible with the EIP-AGRI and the activities of Operational Groups funded under rural development policy. Further information on the EIP-AGRI and Horizon 2020 can be found via the pages of the [EIP-AGRI website](#).
6. The reason for having two networks at European level - the ENRD and EIP-AGRI – is that they each address very different stakeholder groups and interests. Co-ordination and smooth co-operation between the two networks will be achieved via a single, common governance structure. However at national level it is completely up to the Managing Authorities (MAs) to decide how to structure / manage networking services for the EIP-AGRI. There are already several examples of NRNs being given a clear mandate and authority to support the EIP-AGRI
7. Further information on EIP Operation Groups can be found [here](#). During February – May 2014, DG AGRI is organizing a series of 5 regional workshops focused on the practical aspects of establishing Operational Groups under Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) - further information from the workshops is available [here](#).

Networking and innovation...what do we know ?

The next session of the training workshop used the [World Café](#) method to encourage participants to dig deeper into their collective understanding of how rural networks can promote and support a culture of innovation amongst rural stakeholders. The general flow of the World Café we used was as follows:

- 6-7 people were sat at tables and one person at each table was invited to volunteer as “table host”

- We had three rounds of conversation based upon 3 questions (see below) – each conversation lasted 20 minutes
- After each conversation, the table hosts stayed with their tables whilst the other table members moved to another table to contribute their ideas and insights to the next conversation
- The table host initiated each new conversation and invited the table members to share their key insights, questions and ideas with each other

Three questions were presented for discussion. Firstly, the question “What do we understand by innovation in the new rural development regulation?” was used as a warm-up and not harvested¹. And then two further questions which were harvested (see below):

1. What networking tools can be used to promote and support innovation in rural development?
2. What conditions are needed for NRNs / NSUs to efficiently and effectively promote and support innovation?

Q1: What networking tools can be used to promote and support innovation in rural development?

Numerous networking tools were identified and clustered into 7 main groups:

Knowing who you are targeting and what are their needs

- Stakeholder mapping – use different approaches to identify key stakeholders and specific target groups for network activities
- Needs assessment – ask stakeholders about their needs and match specific network activities to specific needs
- Planning – build stakeholder analysis and needs assessment into the Annual Work Plan and connect to other relevant issues

Building inventories and databases

- Don't under-estimate the value of contact lists as a networking tool
- Use databases to make information on existing projects and good practices available to stakeholders
- Ensure national databases are linked to EU databases and vice versa
- Map out and establish contacts with existing networks and organizations active in the area of fostering innovation
- Be creative with databases e.g. consider a database of problems and ideas

Providing information –share information widely through various channels and tools which can reach out to wider audiences, whilst also allowing for some feedback and two-way interaction with stakeholders:

- Newsletters, magazines, publications, TV
- Innovative IT tools
- Smartphones / new technologies (including guidance on how to make best use of these tools for networking)
- Social media
- Web-based partner search tools
- Use the day-to-day language of farmers / rural people

Connecting and Engaging – various networking tools highlighted for encouraging interaction, exchange, mutual learning and at effective connection, including:

- Workshops – when well planned, organised and facilitated can very effectively engage stakeholders
- Working groups (don't make them too big)

¹ Harvesting is the process of collecting and recording the outcomes of discussions.

- Thematic groups / networks etc. to cluster people with common interests / ideas
- Formation of mixed discussion groups (on and off line)
- Farmers networks
- Events based on the peer-to-peer approach
- Seminars
- Games
- Project competitions are a great way to engage stakeholders and share / ideas
- “Initiative Centres” (e.g. as in Portugal) provide a focal point / clearing house for actors to come with their problems / ideas and to find partners

Some **key actors** that should be more actively involved in networking for innovation include:

- Research community – especially applied researchers with good connections with practice
- Key actors from different industries
- Students
- advisory services
- stakeholders from LEADER

Sharing of experience – tools were identified and suggested to promote the sharing of experience, the exchange of existing practices which would allow for discussion and gaining of understanding what it takes to take up new ways of working and learn from examples:

- Exchange of experience meetings
- Presentation of best practices
- Building people together in sub thematic groups
- Matching peers – the networks can identify specific groups or organizations which would benefit from mutual exchange, link them and /or offer them support for their exchange
- Field days – visiting specific examples and case studies
- Use LEADER as a “lab” - LEADER is a tool for sharing information / experience and for incubating innovation
- Repeat EU events on national level

Demonstrating – there was a strong emphasis on the importance of showcasing which will help stakeholders develop motivation and confidence in embarking on new activities and models of work as a tool to foster and diffuse innovation

- Demo projects
- Showcasing
- Make a show room

And then some **general comments** in relation to relevance of networking tools:

- a) It is important to work on different levels- on European, national but also local level
- b) Other conditions that can support the networking for innovation include a Contact Point office (physically close to practitioners), a resource centre/site with access to tools and information from MS and EIP AGRI)
- c) It is about structure and relation – tools have to secure these are available
- d) It is not about the tools, but how we use them
- e) It is important what strategy is used to reach participants
- f) Different tools to be used depending on the different stakeholders
- g) Language is important (translation on national level and on EU level)
- h) Make effective use of existing tools like e.g. LEADER – do not keep re-inventing things

Q2: What conditions are needed for NRNs / NSUs to efficiently and effectively promote and support innovation?

The “enabling conditions” for effective networking for innovation were collected and clustered as follows:

Institutional

- Full **support of the Managing Authority**
- The function / added value of networking for fostering innovation needs to be **better understood**
- **Decisions** need to be made **at programming level** to ensure the of NRNs **to support and promote** innovation is fully developed / enabled
- NSUs should be allowed flexibility and “**freedom for manoeuvre**” with implementation of their work plans
- Some countries have already structures working on innovation – it is useful and necessary **to find who is active on what and bring them together** (e.g. thematic groups, partnerships, etc.)

Financial (and other resources)

- Network support units (NSUs) need appropriate capacity, including **reserved budgets**, sufficient numbers of **staff with correct skills** and relevant networking tools / techniques for fostering innovation
- Look for opportunities to use pre-programme support (e.g. final calls for information / training actions under 2007-2013 programme) to begin animating / developing innovative actions
- Well-**funded translation services** are essential for EU-wide exchange of experience
- Accessibility to a broad range of resources that are well-connected to wider community of stakeholders / actors

Operational

- RDP should set-out the **strategic objectives, role and specific tasks of the NRN with respect to innovation**
- **Actions** for fostering innovation **should be integrated in the NRN work plan** with required resources, actors, activities etc.
- Important to know at what level / scale the NRN will operate to foster innovation
- **Stakeholder mapping** and knowing who **the innovation actors** are to build partnerships, liaise and work in coordination
- Develop common understanding of the role of the NRN and the possibilities for actions to encourage / support innovation – manage the expectations carefully and don’t raise false hopes – be realistic
- Keep all procedures related to innovation support as simple as possible
- Clarity of rules e.g. how to stop an ongoing project if necessary
- Active well-connected **LAGs have a KEY role to play** within the NRN for fostering all forms of innovation, including supporting the EIP-AGRI
- Two-way flow of information (of mutual benefit) between individuals, businesses, networks, regions, member States
- NRNs must develop **stronger connections to the “field” and to the research** community
- Co-operation with young farmers associations – must get more **young people involved with innovation!**
- NRNs must understand the language of both researchers and farmers, but use a “common language” to help them communicate

Attitudinal

- Failure should be allowed / tolerated as part of the learning process
- Encourage an openness to ideas that don’t fit in the usual system of funding – be flexible and inclusive
- NSUs must be professional and their expertise must inspire trust amongst stakeholders

Networking for Innovation in 2014-2020

Day 2 of the training started with three parallel workshops for discussion and exchange about the **practical actions that NRNs / NSUs can undertake** in order to promote and support a culture of innovation by amongst rural stakeholders. The themes selected for the workshops were:

- Networking and innovation as a cross-cutting theme
- LEADER and innovation
- Role of NRNs in implementing the EIP-AGRI

The specific objectives for each workshop were to:

- i) showcase some **existing relevant examples** of “networking for innovation”;
- ii) identify and discuss **specific activities** that can be included in the action plans / annual work plans (AWPs) of NRNs for helping to promote and support innovation;
- iii) if relevant, also **highlight any relevant decisions / actions** that need to be made at national level regarding the programming and / or set-up of the NRNs / NSUs for promoting and supporting innovation

Each workshop began with two presentations to kick-off the discussions.

Workshop 1: *Networking and innovation as a cross-cutting theme in RDPs*

Presentation: [“24-72 hours race to innovation”](#) – presented by Hans-Olof Stålgren, Swedish Rural Network

Presentation: [“Rural Innovation through Knowledge Exchange in Scotland”](#) – presented by Moira Forsyth, Scottish Enterprise, UK

Reflections and lessons learnt from the presentations

- “An innovation is a surprising novelty that has reached the market (i.e. come to use) before it has reached the market it is only an invention.”
- “We have to produce innovation the same way we produce, for instance food”
- Focus on simple questions to simple answers
- To promote innovation must involve all the different actors
- Involving scientists and rural actors – it can be a win-win situation
- Involve rural stakeholders in identifying the problems (not just) scientists (Ask rural businesses what is stopping you growing – not asking universities what research are you doing that is focussed on rural businesses)
- (Some) universities now appreciate that RDPs are not irrelevant.
- (NRNs and others) need to take time to understand the context (i.e. rural communities better)
- Focus groups should be used to identify and test innovations. But need to ensure that it is the people ‘on the ground’.
- Support and follow-up must be ensured

Practical actions that NRNs can include in their annual work plans to foster innovation

1. Understanding the context:

- Start with RDP SWOT, Needs Assessment and Specific Objectives -> work with existing experts to map out how and where the NRN can generally support innovation
- Then focus on where can the NRN can **specifically** add value - identify gaps in innovation support and the connections that the NRN should make

- Remember the importance of bringing together different actors and injecting fresh ideas
- Time and resources are limited, use existing structures and networks to avoid duplication
- Reach out to local people for the generation of ideas - not only farmers, but the whole rural community. Focus on the level where innovation really happens!

2. Problem identification

- NRN to contact existing networks / farmers and other groups / (existing innovation ambassadors) to identify problems and issues
 - Issues might be EIP-AGRI or non-EIP
 - Do this exercise regionally not nationally
 - Even better, do this exercise locally (maximises trust building)
- Develop approach for LAGs to promote innovation (training for LAGs)

3. Tools / activities

- Establish focus / thematic groups for innovation
- Local / regional thematic workshops – bring the concepts to local people and consult / empower them
- Develop a knowledge base of experts / organisations with skills in innovation support services
- Collect and use case study examples of relevant innovation
- Communicate inspiring examples of innovation (thinking outside of the box) e.g. an NRN Youtube channel, local media etc.
- Work towards becoming a broad inclusive network that reaches out to the grassroots
- Build capacity to foster innovation – learn new skills, develop the expertise (individuals, organisations and networks) that already exists, use peer-to-peer learning to transfer this expertise more widely, connect people!

Workshop 2: LEADER and innovation in 2014-2020

Presentation: [“48 hour regional innovation camps”](#) – presented by Juha-Matti Markkola, Finnish Rural Network

Input on [“Innovative studios in Austria”](#) – presented by Marina Brakalova, ENRD Contact Point

Reflections and lessons learnt from the presentations

- NRNs have a key role to play in supporting innovation in LEADER
- Ensure that NRN and LAGs are established very early in the programming period
- Focus on establishing creative local partnerships that have innovative ideas to address the local needs
- Give priority to innovative local projects with local partnerships between local people who know the local conditions
- Regular mechanisms and meeting where research and practitioners advice is offered to LAGs on topics of their interest is key to raising awareness, interest, motivation and confidence to explore new solutions to existing problems. The focusing on one type of challenge allows for exchange of ideas from different perspectives and going in depth in exploring possible solutions
- When ideas and possible project ideas are developed within meetings and seminars like the Innovation camps one, it is important to support the process on later stages too and support the process of creating ownership of those ideas for project implementation
- Innovation was not previously a high priority for most NRNs, plus now there is less focus on innovation through LEADER. It is important to highlight in NRN Action Plans that fostering innovation through LEADER is a high priority for NRNs so that specific tasks and activities are detailed.
- Ensure there is a mechanism within the NRN with LAGs representatives through which specific topics are proposed and become a focus for targeted support

- Connect researchers and practitioners with representatives of the LAG areas to discuss and develop solutions to common issues

Practical actions that NRNs can include in their annual work plans to foster innovation

- Conduct horizontal thematic analysis of Local Development Strategies once approved and find common themes that will facilitate exchanges between LAGs with similar objectives (e.g. regarding tourism, local food etc.) Define common themes / hot topics and bring partners together around these
- Organise “innovation laboratories” to generate / incubate new ideas before project applications
- Think outside the box - build bridges between areas and funds – share information and ideas with other NRNs
- Promote better interaction between rural and urban areas and encourage innovative rural-urban actions
- CLLD approach – raise awareness of other funding sources for innovative actions and facilitate access to these funds
- Plan relevant study visits to share experience / knowledge and foster co-operation from beginning of the programming period
- Develop platforms (databases, publications etc.) of innovative actions supported by LEADER (national and EU)
- Promote connections / exchanges between LAGs and EIP-AGRI Operational Groups (OGs) – encourage LAGs to view OGs as potential new partners
- Training of LAGs on how to promote and support innovation
- Build mechanisms and exchanges to allow for transfer of ideas between rural and urban territories
- Work with LAGs (e.g. Focus Group) on development / application of appropriate selection criteria for innovative local projects / actions
- Ensure on-going consultation with, and feedback to, Managing Authorities (MAs) and Paying Agencies (PAs)

Necessary factors / conditions for NRNs to help foster innovation

- Integrated approach to networking for innovation – consider how best to coordinate supporting innovation through LEADER with EIP-AGRI (Steering Group, Co-ordination Committee etc.)?
- Support for innovation in LEADER must be articulated and included as a specific task in the action plan of NRNs
- Small-scale innovation projects should be allowed – and the risk of failure must be accepted
- Clear co-ordination between MAs, PAs and NRN
- Adequate resources must be available for LAG study visits between countries – this needs to be agreed at programme level
- Adequate resources must be available for relevant training of LAGs by NRNs – this needs to be agreed at programme level
- EU level exchange of staff between network support units (NSUs) on the specific theme of innovation and LEADER
- There should be better general awareness of / access to all funding sources linked to innovation in rural areas

Workshop 3: *The role of NRNs in implementing the EIP-AGRI*

Presentation: [“Networking and the EIP in Portugal”](#) – presented by Maria Custódia Correi and Maria São Luís Centeno, Portuguese National Network for Rural Development

Presentation: [“Networking and the EIP in the Netherlands”](#) – presented by Annemiek Canjels, Limburg Province

Reflections and lessons learnt from the presentations

- Technical assistance money from 2007-2013 is being used in some Member States to build capacity for innovation support services in 2014-2020 e.g. the establishment and running of an Initiative Centre (innovation broker) in Portugal
- There are many existing innovation support services / networks which NRNs can work in partnership with to support the EIP-AGRI – the example from Portugal is particularly inspiring. Existing networks can, for example, provide links to the research community and immediately develop synergy with the NRN
- In order to facilitate a bottom-up implementation of the EIP-AGRI, it may be necessary to firstly build the ‘architecture’ for innovation support services from the top-down
- Some Member States are already very advanced in promoting innovation in the agriculture and agro-food sector – but are they too advanced to provide relevant lessons?
- NRNs can clearly play an important role in supporting implementation of the EIP-AGRI (e.g. awareness-raising, facilitation, dissemination), but there is no one approach that will “fit all”
- Are NRNs trusted by farmers? Do the NRNs fully understand the needs of farmers?
- NRNs will need additional resources to effectively support the EIP-AGRI. If no additional resources, how to achieve more with less? Is there political commitment to provide more resources? Is the added value of the NRNs fully understood / appreciated?
- Can all NRNs provide an independent brokerage type role – especially those with network support units in the Managing Authority?

Practical actions that NRNs can include in their annual work plans to foster innovation

- Quickly raise awareness of the EIP-AGRI with events, workshops, publications etc. – stakeholders need to know more as soon as possible
- Focus on actions for changing the culture of rural innovation, the ‘mindset’ of the institutions, farmers, researchers, advisers etc. needs to be open to the new opportunities for interactive innovation projects
- Map stakeholders relevant to the EIP-AGRI (e.g. to include new stakeholders from research area) – not only who, but also what are their problems / needs
- A clearly structured / strategic approach to NRN support for the EIP-AGRI is recommended, including a specific Action Plan that contains objectives and actions for innovation. Consider separate governance e.g. a Thematic Working Group or Steering Group
- Build on what exists already! New structures do not necessarily have to be created
- Interact with farmers – participate in their events, understand their needs, approach them with information about the opportunities and get their trust

Feedback from the Social Innovation Factory

The Social Innovation Factory (<http://www.socialeinnovatiefabriek.be/nl#sthash.mQ5KxHV5.dpbs>, <https://www.facebook.com/SocialeInnovatieFabriek>) is an association (80%) supported by the Flemish government that promotes social innovation and entrepreneurship for all kinds of beneficiaries (SMEs, private stakeholders etc.) and all sectors.

As long as anyone can prove that they work around a meaningful solution (product or service or model) for a societal challenge (poverty, climate change, greying), they are welcome to approach the Social Innovation Factory. The Factory does not have / offer specialists, but instead facilitate / manage a network of social innovation that brings people together to work face-to-face (half day sessions) to match needs and knowledge.

The Social Innovation Factory is therefore a form of knowledge broker. They use a knowledge sharing coin to get balance between all actors (givers and takers) since everybody has knowledge about something that others can use.

Observations from Social Innovation Factory on the workshops

- Lots of energy and inspiration to be seen in workshops
- Common motivation to support the innovation culture
- Success factor: innovation picked up by market & society
- Success factor: don't look for non-existing problems, find the right solutions - innovation just for the sake of innovation does not work, it needs to address a need
- Need for diversity, for mixed groups and actors (e.g. rural – urban) and repeat with the same people
- Focus on actions, shift from thinking to acting
- Many questions still there in the workshops (e.g. lack of awareness on knowledge sharing and co-creation, ownership of the novelty, how to guarantee the good outcome of this work? (Ensure that the potentials / ideas are going in a good way, get inspired over and over again), bottom up and governance and how to match the decision making?)
- Innovation camp is a good example
- Give and take at regional – local level and what is the role of the network? Why network? To inspire and get inspired, to “give and get information”, and to define what you need and what you give
- Convince that people working are working at different sectors and must come to work together. The others are humans too 😊
- It is not about money but about enabling meetings - it is about connecting not in inner circles but in outer worlds

What do we need to make Networking for Innovation happen?

The final session of the workshop used the [‘Open Space Technology’](#) method to create time and space for people to engage in deeper discussion around issues of concern to them. A total of 8 discussions were **proposed and hosted** by participants. Here are their summaries:

1. Macro-regional aspects of fostering innovation

Potential actions to promote more cross-border support for innovation include:

- Nomination of regional experts for EIP-AGRI Focus Groups
- Macro-regional meetings of stakeholders, including more EIP-AGRI Focus Groups established at macro-regional level
- Macro-regional list of “top priorities” for Operational Groups
- Facilitation of cross-border / trans-national EIP-AGRI Operational Groups – NRNs should facilitate a meeting of Managing Authorities to develop common understanding and commitment. Any cross-border activities will require the approval of MAs to cooperate. This can also be linked to Horizon 2020, LEADER and other sources of complementary funding
- A specific Focus Group for LAGs and other rural actors who are i) already involved in cross-border / trans-national co-operation and ii) interested in activities to foster innovation would be a very useful starting point

2. How to foster innovation without using the word “innovation”?

Decision-makers care about the use of language, but do the stakeholders need to care? The term “innovation” comes with baggage (problem-orientated, novel, complex....) – but does it need to?

Surely the style of engagement with stakeholders and the outcomes achieved are more important than the language used!

- Don't use the term 'innovation' for selection criteria – we will not know what is innovative and works until afterwards
- When preparing calls etc., use the characteristics of innovation without using the word itself
- Focus on stakeholders with vision ("I have a dream") – adjust the EIP approach and make it attractive to them. Keep it practical. Talk about 'testing ideas' and 'finding solutions to an issue'
- Don't introduce priorities for innovation – leave it open
- Independent and rigorous assessment of the selection of projects for funding is essential and will build credibility and trust in the process

3. How do we make innovation PRACTICAL for end users (farmers, rural businesses)?

The current discussion is not practical!

- There is a need for practical examples to show and demonstrate what is meant – do we have these? If yes – do we have enough?
- Where do farmers get their information? Use these communication channels, do not create new ones
- There is need for someone who can talk to farmers and speak the farmers' language. Is this the NRNs? Possibly not – NRNs need to work with farmers' associations to "multiply" through influence and informed opinion
- Who are the advisers / people that farmers trust?
- Use the farmers who talk a lot and influence other farmers. Bring them to meetings – but beware the outspoken "loud mouth".....
- How do we reach farmers who are quiet? Or those that don't have time to come to meetings? Do the LAGs have a role to play?
- Talk practically about the farm and the issues not necessarily about innovation. Do not use EU language! Talk about opportunities. Look at the existing issues / topics of interest to farmers and use them
- What about "quick and easy" mainstream innovation? Many advisory services are already promoting this. What are farmers already doing themselves? Fostering innovation vs. disseminating good practice
- Use competitions for promoting innovation – good examples from other Member States
- Research for innovation....what is the role of research farms? Do we need to map their activities?
- Use tax cuts, facilitate access to credit, to stimulate adoption of innovations

4. How to make the best use of the regional workshops (2014) organised by the EIP Service Point?

Background: From February – May 2014, DG AGRI is organising a series of regional workshops focussed on the practical aspects of setting-up EIP-AGRI Operational Groups. NRNs are requested to support the identification of active stakeholders to participate in the workshop as so-called "EIP multipliers". How can the NRNs make the best use of this opportunity:

- Engage with the stakeholders from the bottom-up. Gain their trust during preparation of the workshop. Share the information you have and discuss.
- Use - and work more with - the concept of EIP multipliers to help "spread the word"
- Disseminate results and information and "keep the fire alive" by sending letters, links to documents, reminders etc.

- Publish the outcomes of the relevant regional workshop on the NRN website – maybe a specific webpage. Include participant lists for networking. Consider translation or a summary document in national language
- Get focussed on using the workshop to begin setting-up Operational Groups
- After the workshop organise a national discussion groups for the people that participated from your country
- Set-up a list with other EIP-interested persons and publish it on site

5. How can we map and assess innovation support services?

Is it possible to find out the position / role of the NRNs in delivering innovation support services?

Yes! The PROAKIS project (www.proakis.eu) have been doing a survey of agricultural advisory services across the EU. All Member States should have a “map” of the national agricultural innovation support system, including the various layers of involved organisations (policy / delivery agencies, public-funded knowledge generators, business development and other support services)

Where does the NRN stand in all this system?

- Find out in your MS who has got the map
- Get the map and discuss with Ministry and stakeholders where the NRN fits into the map
- Identify activities / approaches to enhance the position of the NRN in delivering knowledge transfer and innovation support services (e.g. by filling gaps in the map)

6. How to gain the trust of farmers?

- Which farmers do we refer to? Age, farm structure etc.....take care of differentiation!
- Make your network activities easy and relevant – do not burden farmers with administration
- Be clear what’s in it for the farmers – increased productivity / profitability? More sustainable?
- Talk the language of farmers!
- Multiply your messages through different “ambassadors” – including trusted representatives of farming community
- NRN is a facilitator – they bring stakeholders together and facilitate process of building trust

7. How to ignite and create an active network?

- Set clear objectives
- Bring people together for a clearly focussed purpose and goal(s)
- Maintain action and continuity
- Make it personal – it’s about people
- Foster belief in the network - capture and communicate the added value of networking
- Create pressure and competition - bring in the unexpected (the artists and philosophers!)
- Build capacity – train the trainers in networking tools and techniques

8. How to foster innovation with limited resources for NRNs / NSUs?

Two issues were identified: i) “under-resourcing” (due to limited allocation of resources) and ii) “resource gaps” (due to delays in resource availability e.g. delays with new services due to public procurement procedures). General approaches suggested for dealing with these issues were:

- Use contacts through the network to lobby for more resources e.g. by demonstrating the added value of networking

- Connect with existing innovation support services and use their capacity efficiently and effectively
- Look for resource efficiency and less “resource hungry” activities e.g. double-up on existing events / activities
- Avoid duplication of network services
- Down-scale other activities of lower short-term priority – good planning needed for this, not something *ad hoc*
- Pool resources (common events etc) at international level through strategic partnerships with neighbouring NRNs or via macro-regional clusters of NRNs (e.g. Nordic-Baltic)

Feedback from participants: what are you taking away with you?

As the workshop closed, the participants were invited to tell what they would be taking away from the training:

- Clear idea now about the framework and objectives, clear how to follow up with MA and what we are talking about, insight in innovation process
- Regarding the EIP SP: cooperation is a good idea and it is good to connect databases
- Innovation is a lot about opportunities, not only about problems
- Provided ideas on how to connect stakeholders
- Emphasis on building up on cooperation
- Helped to see problems from different perspectives
- Clear picture from where the different MS come from and how they can cooperate
- Not consider only the EIP but innovation in rural areas more widely
- Allow to identify which questions need to be discussed with colleagues back home
- More practical support is needed by the EIP SP to individual MS
- Innovation requires from the MAs to create and open the discussion with the LAGs on how to support innovation
- The example from Sweden was very useful
- Provided good examples and practices
- Still confused about farmers’ role
- Was a great opportunity to discuss innovation as a cross cutting theme
- Offered diversity of context, a collection of practices across the RDPs
- Different level of progress between the MS, so TNC between NRNs would be useful
- The research community needs to be involved in this discussion / process