

7th NRNs' Meeting

Ponta Delgada, Azores, Portugal

15-16 March 2017

The [7th NRNs' Meeting](#) in Ponta Delgada, in the Azores in Portugal looked at how to share knowledge to:

- develop linkages between NRNs and advisory service providers, and with farmers
- improve NRN implementation and advisory service support for project creation and delivery



Building the Links

The agenda of improving linkages with advisory service providers emerged from previous NRN Meetings, reflecting that the networks wished to develop connections with final beneficiaries and directly affected stakeholders – the farmers – and therefore also with those agencies such as advisory services, farmers' unions and chambers of agriculture dealing directly with farmers. 15 representatives of farm advisory services and chambers of agriculture were present at the meeting, held in Ponta Delgada in São Miguel, the largest island on the Portuguese Archipelago of the Azores.



the creation of jobs.

A welcome and an outline of the delivery of agriculture and rural development in Portugal was given by the Secretary of State for Forestry and Rural Development, Eng. Amândio Torres. The Regional Secretary for Agriculture and Forestry for the Azores, João António Ferreira Ponte, indicated how rural development activities shape the economy of the islands, and the need for continued modernisation, diversification and

The opening session was also framed by an introduction by Helen Williams of DG AGRI and Maria Custódia Correia of the Portuguese NRN. Both speakers emphasised the importance of national and European-level networking and of improving the cooperation between networks and advisors to improve the connection to farmers and project beneficiaries and to involve stakeholders in networks.

The morning session focussed on presentations by Advisory Service Providers, and this started by looking at the local perspective, with an outline of the delivery in Portugal and the Azores, including the [Azores RDP](#) and the [Portuguese Farm Advisory System](#). (Presentations can be directly downloaded by clicking on the link provided)

The morning session addressed a number of different advisory service models in Latvia, Scotland, Ireland and Austria.

The presentations showed a wide range of varying models of interaction, and how this connects with rural network activities, helping to deliver ideas and inspiration. The session concluded in a panel session where the advisors were asked specific points of clarification:

Sofia Björnsson of the Swedish network asked the panellists: *“How are the farmers' needs identified? The demands of farmers are not always what they need. How do you decide what to give advice on?”*

Siobhan MacDonald, Scottish Farm Advisory Service: *“There are issues such as cross-compliance or climate change that the government or EU want us to discuss when we have farmer meetings. We sneak in other topics when we have meetings with farmers about more production related topics (e.g. machinery). They learn at the same time”*

Barry Caslin, TEAGASC: *“we have different stakeholder groups we consult with on their needs. We bring them together every two years and the stakeholders hear each other's issues and this triggers ideas”*

Inge Van Oost of DG AGRI asked: *“A farmer needs a holistic advice which combines various aspects into his final decision. How do you create linkages between “holistic” advisors and certain specialised services also offering some relevant information (for example input suppliers, private advisors related to specific technology, veterinarians, accountants etc)?”*

Barry Caslin: *“The public advisory service has a key role to play in providing training to private advisors. To train their advisors they bring experts to explain the latest developments. There should not be competition. Also, the public side, as a public good, should get involved in those areas where the private sector does not get involved”*

Florian Herzog, Austrian Chamber of Agriculture: *“They have a role to play as public service, especially in the methodological competences of the advisors. Technical knowledge is fine for advisors, but they also have to have the skill to facilitate processes and transformations on farms. This means that advisors should be able to link the farmers with different experts on various topics which are within the network of advisors (even in private companies)”*

Interactive Session – Linkages

On the first day the interactive sessions concentrated on how to create the linkages between NRNs and Advisory Services, including the identification of examples where the linkages have been made.

A summary of the feedback from the work in groups in the first session is shown below. The recommendations were given for all NRNS:

- *Increase sharing of information on NRN and Advisory schemes, e.g. via the Newsletters*
- *Promoting joint ventures and proactive cooperation between key stakeholders*
- *Organise joint events and raise awareness of activities of both the NRN and advisory system*
- *Get farmers out of their ‘silo’ mentality to learn from each other and try to use the LEADER approach to improve engagement with farmers*
- *Bring advisors together to share and cooperate on common issues*
- *NRNs should facilitate the transfer of information from the EU level to local level*
- *Increase flexibility in the way advisors work with farmers and provide Advisory services with clear guidelines to ensure success*

- *MA activity plans should include rules for strategic engagement between NRNs and Advisory Services and avoid conflict of interest as a pre-condition*
- *Issues such as land succession and the organic value chain should be a top priority*
- *Establish clear common objectives*

Overall, it was considered that the NRN must play an active role in creating linkages and addressing challenges. From the session, some examples of specific linkages and challenges were given.

NRN	Linkage examples between NRNs and Advisory Services	Examples of challenges for NRNs and Advisory Services
Cyprus	NRN participates in thematic groups established by Advisory Service	
Germany	Capacity building for advisors Advise farmers on diversification	
Finland	Training at local level Thematic networking : e.g. the Horizon 2020 network	
France	Numerous joint events periodically organised	
Hungary	Strong links with the EIP network LAGs and Advisory Services share the same offices and coordinate their activities.	
Ireland	Ad hoc work packages to engage with advisors : Invitation to be speaker in panel discussions, NGOs and farmers are also invited to exchange	
Italy	Previous programming period : cross compliance system was compulsory and it was explained in a digestible booklet provided to all Advisors	
Portugal	EIP network used to 'spread knowledge'	The key challenge is to involve the informal farmers group
Poland		Conflict of interest between NRNs and Advisory System
Sweden	Involvement of Advisory Services via thematic groups	
UK-Scotland	NRN plays an active role via communication channels and by actively engaging in key activities and on specific issues	
UK-Wales	Ad hoc funding for events and private schemes	

The second session introduced by [Sergiu Didicescu](#) from EIP-Agri and supported by [Inge van Oost](#) from DG AGRI looked to explore what advisory services and NRNs can do to support interactive innovation.

A number of points in response to this were articulated from the breakout groups considering the question and the stages:

- *NRNs are not necessarily the key players for 'brokering' (stage 3) and 'facilitating' (stage 4) Operational Groups (OG). At these latter two stages of developing an OG advisors may play a more important role.*
- *Communicating to the farmers is very important, and NRNs should raise awareness and provide material throughout the four stages of establishing an OG.*
- *NRNs can provide relevant material for each steps (farmers' awareness need to be raised with regard to new ideas and approaches, and new ways of thinking)*
- *NRNs can create platforms at local level, involving LAGs, advisors and municipalities*

- *The OGs have to be balanced, creating connections between farmers and advisors.*
- *Tangible examples of creating ideas and links include Innovation Camps in Finland, Agricultural Fairs in Sweden, Farming Connect in Wales, Innovation Advisors in Germany and organising targeted training for advisors in Wallonia.*

Interactive Session – Thematic Work

The 2nd day was dedicated to looking at the roles of Advisory Service Providers and NRNs in creating projects, following an introductory presentation by [Maria Custódia Correia](#) on how this is organised in Portugal, where the Thematic Groups set up by the NRN issues calls for project proposals. The two questions in the morning sessions were on how Thematic Work is organised in differing Member States, and how they link to the creation of projects. These received responses on how to organise and improve project design and implementation – when carried out by the NRNs or NSUs.

Different approaches to organising thematic work (TW)	How to improve project design and implementation through TW by NRNs / NSUs
TW could be organised either formally or informally (EE is an example of the latter with the NSU only supporting the activities, but not formally setting the agenda for TW)	The NRN supporting the MA in the call process
Some NSUs have in-house Thematic Working Groups (TWGs) composed of experts;	The NRN having its own budget to organise calls and fund projects (PT)
Another approach is for NRN members to be part of a ‘steering group’ providing recommendations for better RDP implementation (BE, Wallonia);	Involving stakeholders in call formulation
Other NSUs organise calls for thematic experts (FR);	A TWG directly providing opinion and advice to the MA (PL)
TWGs could also have a budget of their own to commission projects and activities related to the promotion of local products (SE)	Organising open TWG involving advisory services, LAGs, NGOs, farmers, researchers and MAs (IE);
It is also possible to involve experts from other sectors to get a more comprehensive picture of a TW topic (e.g. broader thematic networks under Horizon 2020)	Establishing links between TWG and Operational Groups (OGs) – TW ideas and outputs can be picked up and further elaborated by OGs and vice versa as a way to generate innovative ideas and ensure their dissemination, including at the policy level
	Ensuring stakeholders have a say in the Annual Work Plan of the NRN (IT)

The summary for this session was that TWGs need to have:

- *clearly defined scope and objectives*
- *the active participation of a wide range of members*
- *understanding and consideration of local needs and how they could be best addressed at the policy level*
- *Using the information from monitoring and evaluation outcomes, and from project results to feed back into policy implementation*

NSUs are largely in favour of a bottom-up approach involving NRN members and grassroots stakeholders working with final beneficiaries in topic formulation through open consultations or direct participation in TWGs to better address local needs. This perspective is tempered with the point raised that this approach can be vulnerable to individual interests and pressure groups - a group representing rural stakeholders may have a specific agenda that they wish to put across - so balance has to be considered in addressing participation.

Breakout Sessions - Cooperation in Practice

The afternoon parallel sessions on 16 March looked at three areas where cooperation can be fostered and build on linkages: The three groups looked at different questions and came up with specific actions.

Group & Question	Responses
Innovation Support – How is innovation supported (and any barriers)?; How can we share the experiences of innovation and cooperate?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advisors should be engaged to deliver innovation brokerage and support • Advisory Services can improve their understanding of EIP-Agri and Horizon 2020 in order to foster innovation • Ensure advisors are incorporated into Operational Groups to add value
Producer Cooperation – How cooperation can develop sectoral or regional producer linkages, including supply chain linkages?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use advisors to foster both sectoral and regional producer groups, including chambers of agriculture – links to NRN Thematic work • Use specialist advisory services to create supply chain links • Consider the wider delivery mechanisms in creating producer support – Chambers of Agriculture
Other Cooperation including LEADER/CLLD - How can we use cooperation to bring together groups of actors/producers at a local level and how we foster cooperation between LEADER/CLLD groups?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link with the Cooperation Measure on areas such as tourism (16.3) and sector groups • Encourage flexible LEADER Development Strategies • Link LEADER Sub-group with national initiatives • Align cooperation procedures between NRNs and develop links with other measures

Cork 2.0 Action Plan

Discussions in this session focused on how NRNs can best support the [implementation](#) of the [Cork 2.0 Declaration](#) on the ground. In particular, which activities organised by NSUs link up to the [Cork 2.0 Action Plan](#).

The discussion highlighted a non-comprehensive list of what NRNs could deliver or add value to the recommendations, linking with the Cork 2.0 Action Plan. This would include:

- examples of rural proofing (already in place in FI and UK)
- various clusters (AT) and incubators (PL)
- relevant Horizon 2020 projects (eg. AgriSpin)
- implementation of EU forest strategy
- BIOEAST initiative; soil directive
- simplification of ESI Funds
- the recommendations of the European forum for advisory services for improving knowledge transfer and innovation in the future CAP
- EU Green Week
- the activities of 22 EU thematic networks



Participants discussed and voted on NRR actions where national and European networks can add the most value to delivering Cork 2.0 had an unequivocal result: **networks are best placed to communicate and inform on rural development achievements** in order to increase stakeholder and citizen awareness

The session concluded with an invitation to NRRNs to submit ideas through the Viima platform ahead of the 8th NRR meeting in [Finland](#).

Over the course of the two-day meeting, a wide range of topics were discussed, and the opportunities for connection also included two lunchtime sessions where specific topics were addressed: [generational renewal](#) and [regionalisation](#).

Key Outcomes

The final session summary raised a number of key points:

- Differing contexts and models at regional and national level need to be understood, even at local level when looking at how stakeholders can link together
- Based on the benefits from forming linkages, more can be done to integrate the activities of NRRNs and Advisory Services
- The networks can be further expanded, through improved linkages with rural development stakeholders, and in developing links with complementary sectors such as short supply chains and tourism

Helen Williams, Deputy Head of Unit, DG AGRI, concluded the meeting by highlighting the benefit of the exchanges in continuing to improve stakeholder linkages. She stressed the value of incorporating the results of the discussions into the work of the NRRNs. Taking forward this work is seen as an important element.

As an example of rural development in action, a study visit was organised to witness Pineapple Production at Profrutos, and tea production at Gorreana.

