



## Designing LEADER for the future

# Key messages from DG AGRI

- Although Local Action Groups (LAGs) and rural communities are still busy with putting into effect their strategies for the years 2014-2020, we are heading towards the end of the implementation of the current Rural Development Programmes and discussing the future CAP Strategic Plans.
- LEADER has been recognised as a valuable territorial development instrument of the CAP and, as a part of Community-led local development, will be supported in all the Member States in the next programming period.
- It is a good opportunity to take stock of the value added by LEADER to rural communities in the last years, but also to look at its efficiency as a policy instrument. This work has already been or shortly will be undertaken through evaluations in the LAGs and on the programme level. It gives us a chance to reflect once again on the very purpose of LEADER, the role that the Local Action Groups are expected to play for the development of rural areas, and the mechanisms used to deliver the approach. Those three elements are interrelated: they can reinforce each other or, if serving opposite purposes, they can provoke tensions leading to gaps between the mission statement and results, between aspirations and reality.
- Thus the importance to agree on the strengths of LEADER and its potential. This should be the starting point when defining the policy role it should play. And, if it is to deliver, the administrative framework should be supportive of that role and consistent with the LEADER method.
- The Common Provisions Regulation proposal makes an explicit reference to what has been broadly perceived as the unique value of LEADER: Community-led local development should build community capacity, stimulate innovation and provide for structural changes. It should thus empower local people to steer development of their areas, taking into account their assets and according to democratically set priorities.
- We need strong LAGs able to respond to the challenges which Europe's rural communities are facing today: climate change, ecological/ biodiversity crisis, rural depopulation and demographic trends, the digital divide, migration – to name only some of the most pressing challenges in our rapidly changing world. Rural stakeholders should be able to get involved whenever their action brings value and LEADER should help them build resilience and transition towards more sustainable future.
- To do so, LEADER needs to be put in a position to make use of the full potential of the bottom-up method: only then can LAGs be truly responsive, develop multi-sectoral, integrated approaches and make a real difference. Mobilise the diversity and creativity of local actors and support community action.
- The New Delivery Model proposed for the upcoming programming period offers the Member States much flexibility in designing their future CAP Strategic Plan interventions, as well as their control and penalties systems. This should allow the authorities to define a specific delivery system for LEADER. One that is supportive of the objectives set for the instrument as well as coherent with the LEADER method and related specific features of LEADER projects (e.g. small scale, bottom-up, community oriented).
- Much is possible: wide use of simplified costs options, including those established by the LAGs for individual projects based on a draft budget submitted by beneficiary; umbrella projects, where LAGs take responsibility and coordinate a series of actions requiring e.g. collective involvement or targeting disadvantaged population groups; innovation grants; and much more. The best ideas come from exchanges of different points of view: Member States are encouraged to design the delivery system for LEADER together with its stakeholders, so that it can make a real difference.
- There are numerous examples of successful approaches in LEADER implementation. Many of them have been discussed in the LEADER events and are showcased on the ENRD webpage. Although one size does not fit all, many collected practices may serve as inspiration for the others.
- LEADER can bring change and help dealing with challenges where local involvement is crucial. Yet, the ambitions set for the instrument need to be anchored in adequate implementing mechanisms and resources. Many good solutions are possible.
- The Member States are called to seize the opportunity offered by the new CAP and design a truly simple and efficient package for LEADER post-2020 building on the lessons learnt from the past and daring to go off-the beaten tracks in the spirit of the method they are promoting.

