

The ENRD seminar provided an overview of the findings and recommendations of the **ENRD Thematic Group (TG) on water and soils**, running between September 2017 and June 2018.

The TG explored possibilities for supporting sustainable soil and water management practices under the EAFRD, through the presentation of existing successful examples of relevant funded projects.

Participants to the seminar discussed **the needs and steps required to create an enabling environment** for better supporting the sustainable management of water and soils under the current policy framework and looking ahead to the future CAP post 2020.

Event Information

Date: 14 June 2018

Location: Brussels, Belgium

Organiser: ENRD Contact Point

Chair: Josefine Loriz-Hoffmann (Director, DG AGRI)

Participants: 66 - including EU institutions, European organisations, Managing Authorities, Paying Agencies, National Rural Networks, farmers, researchers and private sector representatives

Outcomes: Insights on how to replicate successful schemes and ideas for the future

Website: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/enrd-seminar-sustainable-management-water-and-soils_en

Findings and recommendations of the ENRD Thematic Group on Water and Soils



Turku, 15 May 2018 – 4th TG meeting hosted by the Finnish National Rural

Ben Allen and Silvia Nanni – ENRD Contact Point and Institute for European Environmental Policy presented the main outcomes and recommendations arising from the analytical work carried out by the Thematic Group under the 3 main sub-themes: 'results-based payment schemes' (RBPS); 'multi-actor and collaborative approaches' (MAA); and 'nutrient management planning' (NMP). Ensuring sufficient support over the long term (sometimes multiple programming periods) is necessary to achieve results in practice, particularly for soil improvements that can take many years to realise. Effective targeting, clear priorities and monitoring is essential to track progress and reward results. Pilot projects are an important component of RDP development to test new and innovative approaches before implementation. Advisory services, training (arguably compulsory), demonstration activities and support for leadership are needed to assist farmers and other rural actors to replicate successful models. Finally, soil management plans (SMPs) with a clear nutrient management component could become a pre-requisite of support for soil & water management in RDPs, however, guidance and templates on how to prepare SMPs are needed.

Outcomes of group discussions

GROUP 1 – 'Empowering farmers'



Case studies presented

- Nat Page – '[Results-based Agri-environment Payment Scheme](#)' (Romania)
- Petri Rinne – '[OSMO](#)' (Finland)
- Luc Gallopyn – '[RBPS for soil and water](#)' (Belgium/Flanders)

Key messages

- Provided environmental soundness, the **simpler** the scheme, the easier its implementation is;
- **Farmers should be involved** in the design of an agri-environment-climate payment scheme **from the very beginning**, especially to test the proposed indicators and their monitoring mechanisms;
- Milestones for actions should not be linked to calendar dates, but rather to the '**natural cycles**' of farming;
- Greater efforts should be made to **promote advisory services**, communication and demonstration activities to assist farmers and to support capacity building also in relation to the **use of latest generation smart tools** (including precision farming and satellite imagery).

GROUP 2 – ‘Low input agriculture’



Case studies presented

- Linda Larsson – [Greppa Näringen](#) (Sweden)
- Maria Pat González Dugo – [AGROgestor](#) (Spain)
- Nicola Lucci – [Aso Valley](#) (Italy)

Key messages

- **Farmers’ perspective and engagement should be the starting point** of any project or agri-environment-climate payment scheme for the monitoring, improved efficiency;
- It is important to identify the **specific challenges**, the **correct scale** to focus on and the appropriate **monitoring system** (also relying on smart tools, such as satellite technology), to ensure both the feasibility of a project and an appropriate level of ambition;
- Additional tools should be made available under RDPs (in addition to the cooperation measure 16) to encourage the activities of **coordinators, facilitators and cooperation brokers** at local level to ensure a **critical level of participation**;
- Financial support for initiatives aiming at the promotion of sustainable agricultural practices and the reduction of agricultural inputs should be secured for a **longer timeframe, over different programming periods** to achieve concrete results.

GROUP 3 – ‘Water management cooperation’

Case studies presented

- Veronica Manganiello – [SIGRIAN](#) (Italy)
- Simon Bonnard – [Terragr’eau](#) (France)
- Maud Bousquet and Thierry Boudaud – [Coop de l’eau 79](#) (France)

Key messages

- Building **public-private partnerships** (gathering companies, local authorities, and farmers) by linking private interests to the delivery of **public goods** would allow the reduction of costs for the farmers and share responsibilities and add new skills;
- Demonstration activities, pilots and feasibility studies are extremely helpful to **raise awareness** and should be supported to a greater extent;
- Ensuring **data availability and reliability** is cornerstone for any water management project;
- Support through recognition of **higher transaction costs** should be explored further to facilitate cooperation projects;
- Further efforts should be made to enhance **synergies among available funding sources** at all levels.



Support possibilities under the Rural Development Programmes: Member States’ experiences



Eija Hagelberg – Project Director Baltic Sea Action Group

In Finland 86% of active farmers are involved in agri-environment commitments and the total area targeted is 1,9M ha.

Support for sustainable water and soil management practices is mainly addressed to enhance soil structure and biodiversity to: prevent soil erosion, improve carbon sequestration and increase soil water storage capacity. Such interventions are accompanied by investments to improve drainage and irrigation systems. A combination of RDP measures is used: many tools are already available, and it is essential to raise awareness about their existence and share expertise through peer-to-peer exchanges and group advisory methods, which have been found to be the most effective ways to share knowledge.

Luc Gallopyn - Flemish Land Agency, Belgium

In the Flanders a new results-based approach to improve water and soil quality is being tested in some areas, more specifically on land parcels of at least 2 ha size for a minimum duration of 5 years. Farmers are encouraged to use arable crops associated with lower risks of soil erosion and nitrate leaching (i.e. cereal crops, maize, sugar beets, fodder beets, grass/clover, Brussels sprout, chicory, and most catch-crops). The goal is to improve the level of organic matter in the soil. Beneficiaries also commit to receive advisory services before signing the contract and to perform soil testing to check the acidity (pH) and the residual nitrogen at the end of the growing season.



Reactions to the recommendations of the Thematic Group



Nicoleta Olaru – Romanian Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development

Within the Romanian RDP, the prevention of soil erosion and the improvement of soil and water quality are targeted under the agri-environment-climate measure (AECM) through the combination of interventions such as: the planting of cover crops, the prohibition of the use of chemical fertilizers, limited grazing and restricted use of manure in high nature value grasslands and support for traditional agricultural practices on permanent grasslands with manual works or light equipment.

In 2015, Romania experienced the loss of a significant number of participating farmers, who quit the schemes due to the complexity of the requirements, often especially challenging for small farms. Therefore, it is essential to encourage farmers to commit further to AECM and Organic Farming schemes and to assist them in maintaining the commitments over the years.



Joost Teigeler – Dutch Enterprise Agency

RBPS and multi-actor approaches achieve better outcomes when combined. Their combination is therefore a logical landing point. The integration of nutrient management planning (NMP) with these two approaches can be more challenging. In the Netherlands NMP is obligatory.

The Dutch collective approach was developed over a period of 15 years necessary to bring the members of the collectives to act together. It is very important to invest time in the development of collaborative approaches in the long term and to invest in advisory services, which played an important role in the Dutch experience: an association of collectives is available in the Netherlands to assist farmers, step-by-step, to become part of the collective scheme with ambitious

Danilo Marandola – Italian National Rural Network



When we talk about capacity building we should also consider - in addition to the development of specific expertise - the importance of investing in 'soft' measures. Good social skills are necessary to deal with farmers, and advisors need to learn about and enhance these skills. Training for advisors is also of great importance. In this respect we can build on the experience of LAGs about how to employ 'soft' skills when dealing with different stakeholders.

Relying only on the good will of farmers and their 'devotion' to the safeguard of the environment and the landscapes is sometimes not enough. We must not forget that farmers are entrepreneurs, exposed to financial risk. We therefore need to better assist them, with appropriate advisory tools and guide them in the correct implementation of the relevant schemes helping them to gain access to the available funding resources, support and advice.

Eija Hagelberg – Project Director Baltic Sea Action Group



Getting more farmers involved over a larger territory can lead to multiplying environmental results. For instance, in farmers plant winter cover crops, improving soil conditions on a wider scale.

It is difficult to change the design of AECM measures within this programming period at this stage, but it is possible to encourage stakeholders to initiate new projects and raise awareness on these topics by supporting knowledge transfer and communication activities. We must also provide farmers with the necessary advisory services to build the capacity to do more in future. Making sure that farmers have a 'deeper' understanding of soil and water issues is probably more important than having mandatory soil management plans.





Josefine Loriz-Hoffmann – Director, DG AGRI, European Commission

The experiences presented at the Seminar show the importance of the role played by facilitators to mobilise farmers to get actively involved in the successful implementation of the policy. The Commission has been trying to further encourage the use of 'soft' tools; however, only about 2-3% of our expenditure is allocated to training and advisory services. There is still a tendency in MSs to dedicate more efforts rather in large investment than 'soft' measures. In our view investing in tailor-made advisory services, facilitation, training and demonstration activities is key to accompany farmers and help build critical mass.

It took 15 years to build the Dutch collective approach and we certainly need to look at long-term goals. We should really start now supporting farmers to help them join forces and work together to achieve better results.

We have to operate at three levels: at the level of farmers to let them know what we expect from them; at the level of Managing Authorities to assist them in drafting of the Programmes; and at the EU level, to spread the knowledge and share good practices through training, workshops and seminars like this one, which are extremely useful, and also through other communication channels that we need to explore.

Soil and Water in the future CAP post 2020



Martin Scheele – DG AGRI, European Commission presented the proposals for the future CAP delivery model post 2020, with a special focus on the new green architecture relevant for water and soil management. The new delivery model will

provide for greater flexibility to better address local needs and challenges.

This will allow a better fine-tuning of the policy 'on the ground', in line with the needs assessment and the specific EU objectives. A common framework will be set out at EU level, including objectives, general types of interventions (the number of which is reduced from 70 – measures and sub-measures – to 9), simplified rules of implementation and a comprehensive set of common indicators for setting targets.

Member States will be responsible for the definition of eligibility conditions and targets. Such a system will simplify the delivery of the policy, shifting the focus from EU rules and compliance to results and performance.

Claudia Muresan – DG AGRI, European Commission outlined the rationale, minimum requirements and functionality of the Farm Sustainability Tool for Nutrients (FaST). The use of this new mobile application for on-farm nutrient



management, is envisaged as part of the post-2020 CAP proposal. Farmers will be required to use the tool (i.e. activate it and provide the relevant data entry) but will not be subject to further controls or inspections. The FaST will simplify on-farm nutrient management by integrating all legal requirements and will be in the hands of the farmers, through their mobile devices. In addition, it will automatically integrate the collected data with those available in IACS, LIPS and other databases avoiding duplications. The tool will allow for a better assessment of the impacts of EU policies and subsidies on the reduction of inputs and on the overall reduction of diffuse pollution from agriculture. A FaST demonstrator developed by the European Commission might be made available in early 2019.

Additional information on the sustainable management of water and soils:

DEDICATED WEBPAGE:

ENRD Thematic Group on Water and Soils [webpage](#)



ENRD PUBLICATIONS:

- [EU Rural Review 25: 'Resource Efficiency'](#)
- [EAFRD Projects Brochure: 'Resource-Efficient Rural Economy'](#)

