

The 16th NRN meeting was co-organised with the [Spanish Rural Network](#) and brought together participants representing 18 National Rural Networks (NRNs) to explore the state of play in developing CAP Networks.

Discussions focused on the main challenges and solutions identified in preparing National CAP Networks within Member States (MS). Participants exchanged information about their approaches to designing Networks and about other NSU activities and thematic work.

The meeting was complemented by a site visit to three good practice project examples funded by the regional Rural Development Programme.

Event Information

Title: 16th NRN Meeting

Date: 3 March 2020

Location: Calatayud, Spain

Organisers: ENRD Contact Point and Spanish NRN

Participants: 51 participants from 18 MS

Outcomes: Useful peer-learning on state-of-play and success factors for designing effective National CAP Networks under the CAP Strategic Plans (CSPs).

Webpage: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/16th-nrn-meeting_en

Meeting Highlights

Carolina Gutierrez Ansotegui, deputy director of the Spanish Ministry of Agriculture, Fishing and Food, stated that the meeting was well-timed because while to date Spain had been focusing on the SWOT for its CSP, it is now starting to plan their future National CAP Network. She presented NRN activities in Spain such as a recent advertising campaign providing the rural population with information on RDP opportunities and addressing challenges related to both CAP Pillar I and II.

Helen Williams from DG AGRI, European Commission explained that this NRN meeting was organised to build on outcomes from previous NRN activity on the development of future National CAP Networks. She underlined that while it is the Managing Authorities (MAs) who are responsible for developing the new National CAP Networks, knowledge transfer and peer-learning between NSUs on this topic, including stakeholder consultation, can be very useful for all MS.

In a follow-up [presentation](#), Helen Williams also presented a brief overview of MS Roadmaps showing state-of-play of preparations for the CSPs together with an estimated CAP programming timeline. This timetable is now dependant on the progress of negotiations on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and the legislative process for the CAP Reform and related transitional arrangements. A framing [presentation](#) was made on future networking, including an overview of the current objectives and tasks of NRNs with those proposed for post 2020. The link between networking and AKIS, and some reflections on areas where networking could involve also Pillar I actors were also signalled.

Future CSPs and CAP Networks should bring together actions under both CAP Pillars to target complex issues such as climate change, farm competitiveness, rural jobs, biodiversity, generational renewal, risk management and value chains.

Kasia Panfil from the ENRD Contact Point [presented the results](#) of the CP survey on designing CAP Networks that was completed by NSUs in February 2020. In total, 21 answers were received from 19 MS. Findings indicate that the NSUs are involved in designing future CAP Networks via working groups, events, public discussions and other consultations. Ten MS reported that they had taken concrete steps, such as: producing draft CAP Network designs; descriptions of CAP Network interventions including Pillar I activities; or undertaking independent analysis of network options for further incorporating the AKIS system. Fifteen MS reported progress with planning for territorial or social development issues (e.g. LEADER and Smart Villages). The main novelty for rural networking in the MS relates to the integration of Pillar 1 and the need for reinforced linkages with agricultural stakeholders. Financial and human resource issues for NSUs in the management of additional tasks while in the context of reduced future budgets were also identified as a challenge by many MS.

A panel session then focused on sharing further experiences in designing CAP Networks. Six MS presented their approach and the steps that they had taken so far.

Patricia Martínez Alonso from the Spanish NSU described their progress with CAP strategic planning, including the SWOT analysis, needs assessment and intervention strategy along with a tentative timetable. Pillar I stakeholders in Spain have already signalled their interest in the new CAP Network. She also raised the issue of whether and how the future National CAP Network will be part of the CAP's performance-based delivery model and the need to better understand the role of the NSU in AKIS.

Tamar Kok summarised the [Dutch CAP Network](#) state of play of including proposals for strong NRN links with AKIS and cross-Pillar synergies for eco-schemes, environment and climate management. Ongoing work will focus on retaining and enhancing existing successful approaches taken by the Rural Network.

Zuzana Dvořáková from the Czech NSU (via video message) drew attention to successes in helping the CSP partners to work together, highlighting [the NRN's role](#) in building on best current practices and strengthening existing collaboration.

Matej Štepec, from the Slovenian NSU explained [their learning process](#) which will include reviewing the SWOTs for all nine CAP Specific Objectives to see where the Network could best intervene and also clarifying Pillar I partners' needs and opportunities, which might grow over the period. At present, Pillar I actors are unaware of the opportunities presented by the new network, so some mutual learning will be required.

Pawel Krzeczunowicz presented the [Polish NSU's approach](#), which is currently focused more on implementing projects than coordinating other stakeholder activities and includes running an annual grant award for network partners. New arrangements for the management of Poland's CAP Network are being explored by the MA, with more priority for AKIS and urban-rural co-operation expected to be significant for the future Network.

Austrian representatives (Michael Fischer, NSU and Veronika Madner, MA) underlined the importance of [demonstrating the value of networks and networking](#), particularly for new partners working with Pillar 1. The MA also explained their approach in designing their CAP network, building on their existing structure and using evaluation and self-assessment findings on the current NRN. The Network would target stakeholders and multipliers.

In the Q&A session that followed, participants noted the potential scope for AKIS to cover a broad spectrum of socio-economic and environmental topics of importance to rural Europe. EIP-AGRI Operational Groups (OGs), LEADER, and Smart Village initiatives were confirmed as examples of instruments which could broaden the access to knowledge. The Dutch experience showed that AKIS can be reinforced by improving awareness among rural and agri-food media about its potential, and in particular, using these media to maximise the

knowledge transfer of good practices and project examples. Some participants signalled a need to better understand AKIS and the role Networks were envisaged to play within it

CAP Network priorities were another important Q&A subject for the NRN meeting participants. They raised their concern about ensuring adequate coverage of subjects such as: climate change; environment; biodiversity; eco-schemes; bioeconomy; digitalisation; knowledge transfer; the Green Deal; monitoring systems; and communication. There is a wide range of topics for finite resources, yet some topics which are less familiar for NSUs.

In answer to queries, DG AGRI pointed out that the flexibility in the regulatory framework allows the future Networks to be tailored to the specific needs and interests of each MS. The Commission's aim was an evolution of networking to adapt to the new CAP, not a revolution or loss of existing strengths. As regards monitoring systems, they indicated that there were currently no specific indicators envisaged at level of EU legal framework for technical assistance support including Networks, but took note of the requests for early clarity on any type of common reporting which might be requested. Strong interest was expressed by some participants to continue using the existing well-established NRN name. DG AGRI replied that the Commission's key focus was to have National CAP Networks which delivered effectively on the full-range of tasks and objectives proposed, across the full CSP and relevant partners. This did not seem to preclude, while formally the new Networks would be "National CAP Networks", that within each MS, the Networks can use the name that is most appropriate in their specific context.

During the day, DG AGRI provided the possibility for interested NRNs to have short bilateral meetings in the margins of the meeting to exchange on any specific issues or queries relating to preparation of their future National CAP Networks. 12 MS took up this opportunity.

Challenges and solutions in creating CAP Networks

"Is building a National CAP Network easy?" was the question posed during a series of afternoon working groups. NRN delegates identified five useful success factors for helping the creation of new CAP Networks:



- ❖ Agree and clearly publicise responsibilities within the Network for different tasks – including building a common understanding of horizontal tasks.
- ❖ Agree and clearly publicise the Network's priorities, seeking partnerships where private external funding can be leveraged or other sources of support to maximise the Network's potential impact.
- ❖ Establish flexibility in implementation arrangements to allow/help Networks to adapt to changing operational circumstances.
- ❖ Build on and enhance the strengths of the current rural networks in order to retain momentum and stakeholder confidence as well as avoiding duplication of effort or 're-inventing wheels'.
- ❖ Pro-actively involve a large variety of CAP stakeholders via regular communication and meetings, clear information to key players, capacity building and support from MAs.

It was agreed that continued knowledge transfers between MS (at bilateral and EU levels) on these success factors and on the progress in designing the new National CAP Networks will be useful for the NSUs in the future.

Update on EU rural networking activities

During the session on the update of EU rural networking activities, several key presentations were made:

- Pacôme Elouna Eyenga of the EIP Service Point provided an [update of the SP activities](#) foreseen in their Annual Work Programme 2020-2021. The activities are based on priorities such as the EU agricultural Research & Innovation strategic approach, thematic networking with OGs, and extending and consolidating the EIP network and cooperation.
- David Lamb from the ENRD Contact Point presented an [update of future ENRD CP activities](#). These reinforce the CP's current focus on supporting the transition to the post 2020 CAP, working more closely with agricultural, environmental, territorial, and social organisations and a series of thematic activities. He also presented the results of the analysis of the Common Network Statistics.
- Myles Stiffler from the ENRD Evaluation Helpdesk presented an update of the Helpdesk's [activities](#). This included work to develop better evaluation methodologies and tools to prepare for the Ex-ante evaluation of the CAP Strategic Plans and the launch of the new Thematic Working Group, 'Ex-post evaluation of RDPs 2014-2020: Learning from practice'.
- Maria Gustafsson from the Swedish NSU invited participants to the [17th NRN meeting in May](#) in Mullsjö/Jönköping, Sweden. The agenda includes sessions on rural networks' governance and rural/urban narratives.



Outcomes and Actions

The meeting provided specific examples of MS progress in designing National CAP Networks and the role(s) of NSUs in this process. Particular attention was paid to identifying some of the success factors identified at MS and EU levels that can help future CAP Networks to support the implementation of the future CAP Strategic Plans.

At the end of the meeting, participants were invited to join in an optional 'Escape Room' which focused on designing CAP Networks, and showcased a very different style of facilitation - which was the topic of the [NRN workshop](#) also held in Calatayud the following day.

Following these activities, NRN Meeting participants were also able to visit three nearby RDP funded projects, focusing on [cooperative wine and oil production and processing](#), a LEADER [cooperation project between seven LAGs on cultural heritage](#), and a family business project which established [a restaurant and accommodation in a rural Spanish village](#).