

## EVENT Highlights

**networX** was a landmark event for rural networking, bringing together rural networking stakeholders from across and beyond the EU. Over two days, the event succeeded in demonstrating the results of the past ten years of rural networking and proactively looking at its future. Its interactive format gave participants plenty of space and time for informal discussions, inspiring conversations and sharing of experiences.

Framed by inspiring keynote speeches, the major aspects of the event were six thematic strands where participants could select from a total of 15 working sessions, a Marketplace showcasing rural networks and rural stakeholder representatives and the award ceremony for the **Rural Inspiration Awards**, recognising good practices through EAFRD-funded projects from across the EU.

**Dates:** 11-12 April 2019

**Participants:** 410

**Keynote Speakers:** Phil Hogan, Margaritis Schinas, Mihail Dumitru (European Commission)

**Speakers – 10 Years of Rural Networking:** Juha-Matti Markkola (FI – NRN), Gaëlle Marion (DG AGRI), Riccardo Passero (IT – NRN), Svetlana Boyanova (BG – Operational Group), Kristiina Tammets (EE – LAG), Pawel Krzeczunowicz (PL – NRN), Joona Hellman (FI – vlogger), Elona Moerdijk (NL – NRN)

**Speakers – Closing Panel:** Maria Gustafsson (SE - NRN), Oana Neagu (Copa Cogeca), Helle Bøge Breindahl (DK – LAG)

**Facilitators:** Michael Gregory, David Lamb, John Grieve (ENRD CP)

## OPENING PLENARY – KEYNOTE MESSAGES

The opening plenary session carried key messages not only reflecting on over 10 years of rural networking, but on the role of networks now and in the future.

The Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, [Phil Hogan](#), opened [networX](#) and outlined how in the last decade Rural Networks have played an important role in supporting the implementation and delivery of rural development programmes all over Europe. Commissioner Hogan underlined that the rural networks provide a platform for vital connections between people. They continue to be a powerful tool for transferring knowledge and sharing experience on matters of policy design, implementation, innovation and evaluation.

In particular, Commissioner Hogan underlined that the proposal for the future CAP provides scope for a reinforced role of networking, recognising how the CAP as a whole and not only its second pillar can contribute to increased stakeholder involvement, improved outcomes and exchange of experience and good practices.



**Mr. Hogan concluded:**

*“The main thing with cooperation is that there is a really good energy between the actors working together. If this is not the case, then you can forget the project.”*

Chief European Commission Spokesperson Margaritis Schinas followed on from Commissioner Hogan's opening message, recognising that rural development represents Europe's positive agenda, and the need for networks to communicate these positive messages on European initiatives.



**Mr. Schinas** emphasised to [networX](#) participants their vital role in communicating what Europe should stand for:

*“Europe will not have rural deserts, our rural communities will continue to be at the heart of a vibrant, green and social economy.”*

He concluded by highlighting to those present the need to ‘de-Brusselise’ Europe, and his message to the networks was:

*“You are the positive agenda for Europe. You are our future.”*

## 10 YEARS OF RURAL NETWORKING

To reflect on [10 years of European rural networking](#), in the opening session speakers from across Europe shared their experiences, personal highlights and thoughts for the future. This set the scene, taking participants from the first national network set up in Finland, through the experience of setting up the ENRD, and experiences from Italy in regional work, through to the set-up of a new EIP-AGRI network in Bulgaria and taking over running the network in Poland. The most recent experiences were shared by a [rural youth vlogger](#) and a new member of the NRN in the Netherlands.



© European Commission, 2019

## NETWORX STRANDS – DAY 1: CURRENT ACTIONS

Over the two days of networX, participants could take part in a mix of six different strands of activities, each addressing a different area of rural networking, and each identifying and showcasing current best practice, while looking to the future in their concluding sessions. On Day 1, networX Strands included:

- [Networking for Policy](#) – lessons learned for networking in different policy areas (with sessions on Smart Villages, Bioeconomy and lessons from other European policy networks).
- [Building a Network](#) – inviting participants to build their own network, identifying key components, members and actions.
- [Networking with LEADER](#) – Action Labs exploring LEADER networking examples, their added value and key factors in their success.
- Networking for Innovation – highlighting good innovation networking practices for rural areas, agriculture and forestry.
- Networking for Evaluation – networking supporting evaluation and evaluation supporting networking.
- [Stakeholder engagement](#) – exploring examples of engaging and delivering to different rural stakeholder types, and a drop-in ‘speed networking’ session matching stakeholders with each other.

On Day 1, participants were able to select from 10 different sessions, with a focus in each session on interaction and ‘telling the story’ of networking. These enabled participants to enhance their understanding and explore new possibilities through in-depth engagement and discussion.



© European Commission, 2019



© European Commission, 2019

## MARKETPLACE

Throughout networX, significant opportunities were also available to explore other parallel activities. In the [Marketplace](#), 41 stands were grouped into nine zones covering regional clusters around Europe, enabling the participation of non-EU networks, and with thematic zones on agricultural, territorial and innovation themes. Activities of rural networks were further demonstrated on a spotlight stage within the Marketplace which showcased projects and people. A total of 13 performances from all across Europe continued throughout the event, including more cultural offerings during the evening. For those looking for more relaxed interaction, a LEADER Lounge also enabled discussion between and with Local Action Groups (LAGs) attending the event.



© European Commission, 2019

## RURAL INSPIRATION AWARDS

The Rural Inspiration Awards ceremony closed Day 1, bringing together 25 finalists selected from 176 entries from 22 Member States. The winners (selected by an expert jury in five thematic categories and one selected through online voting) received their award from Commissioner Hogan.

The winning projects were:

- Improving the competitiveness of rural areas – [Agroberry](#) (Spain)
- Environment & Climate action – [Kowalski Farm](#) (Poland)
- Rural Revitalisation – [Kuitua Pohjoiseen](#) (Finland)
- Social inclusion – [Enerterre](#) (France)
- LEADER/CLLD – [Tiges Chavées](#) (Belgium)
- Popular Vote – [Zeitgeist Enns](#) (Austria)



© European Commission, 2019

## NETWORX STRANDS – DAY 2: FUTURE ACTIVITIES

Following a full day of interaction and networking activities lasting long into the evening, participants returned on Day 2 to conclude their discussions across the six strands, with a focus on developing outcomes to take forward into the future.

The main outcomes of all these discussions looked into widening and deepening engagement with stakeholders throughout rural Europe, without losing sight of existing good practice and structures, and on how to take action in the immediate future to build these.

These final sessions of each strand looked at the structure and possible priorities of future CAP networks (EU and national) and the actions and activities that networks will need to consider to evolve and to engage stakeholders across the two pillars of the CAP. As the key points were brought together, networX participants were invited to give insight and inspiration in the messages they took back home.



© European Commission, 2019

## CLOSING PLENARY

After two days of working together, participants gathered together in the closing plenary to share their take-away messages and exchange on key points. A panel of keynote listeners – Maria Gustafsson (SE – NRR), Oana Neagu (Copa-Cogeca) and Helle Bøge Breindahl (DK – LAG) gave their own perspective and takeaway messages from networX. Moderating the panel, Michael Gregory from the ENRD Contact Point asked the panellists two questions:

1. “From your own perspective, and what you have heard over the past two days, firstly – what do you think is the single most important achievement of rural development networking so far?”
2. “Secondly, going forward, what do you think is the biggest challenge facing EU rural networking?”

**“We shouldn’t feel like we are left behind. We are the front runners. Networks have the key to a more sustainable future.”**

Maria Gustafsson  
(Swedish NSU)

**“We have a big responsibility for the future to ensure sustainable rural areas. Let’s continue this great journey together and convince more people to join us.”**

Oana Neagu  
(Copa-Cogeca)

**“Networking is about curiosity, so be curious – about people, projects and other networks. And don’t forget to have fun!”**

Helle Bøge Breindahl  
(LAG Manager, Denmark)

Their comments were complemented by six other [inspiring messages](#) from across the six strands of networX.



© European Commission, 2019

## Closing speech

networX was closed by DG AGRI Deputy Director-General Mihail Dumitru. Mr Dumitru emphasised the role of networking in implementation of rural development policy over the last 10 years. Future brings even more importance to networking, as the scope of activities increases to cover the full breadth of the proposed CAP Strategic Plans. This reflected the Commission’s confidence in the benefits and added value of interaction and peer-to-peer exchanges, sharing experiences and providing opportunities for supporting all actors across the CAP implementation. He briefly introduced the proposals for streamlining EU-level networking structures, as well as the Commission’s planned pilot communication campaign, targeting rural areas where networks will be key partners.



Mr Dumitru closed with his own inspiring message:

**“CAP post 2020 is very challenging and networks must play an important role to make it a success.”**

## LEARN MORE

Find the reports from all the networX thematic strands on the ENRD website:  
[https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/networx-inspiring-rural-europe\\_en](https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/networx-inspiring-rural-europe_en)