

RURAL BUSINESSES – THE FUTURE IS NOW

An ENRD seminar about revitalising rural areas through business innovation

30th March 2017

Hotel Metropole, Brussels

Background

Rural areas and rural economies are undergoing massive change. Rural businesses – *both farm and non-farm* – are having to navigate the future in the face of increasingly competitive and volatile global value chains, climate change, resource depletion, major population shifts, digitisation and rapidly evolving new technologies. In this situation, business as usual is simply not an option.

The future for rural businesses is, and has to be, now. In this spirit, the recent Cork Declaration argues that rural areas have a number of potential advantages which can create the conditions for future rural prosperity and vitality as well as delivering “innovative, inclusive and sustainable solutions for current and future societal challenges”.

There is already a very wide range of EU, national and regional initiatives designed to help European businesses to make the most of the challenges and opportunities mentioned above. These include policies for *digitisation*, *smart specialisation* and *social innovation*. This seminar will allow different rural stakeholders to;

- Examine these and other **key policies for business innovation through a rural lens**. Participants will be able to share lessons and experience about how support tools can be made “fit for rural business” (in other words, initiate “rural proofing” as recommended by the Cork Declaration)
- Share inspiring examples of business innovation and **explore how such initiatives can be extended in practice through the Rural Development Programmes**.

The Rural Development Programmes deploy a powerful combination of measures and tools which can support all kinds of rural businesses. These include an expected 2600 LEADER groups and some 3200 Operational Groups as well as measures for knowledge transfer, advice and a range of investment measures. Participants will explore how RDP support to business innovation can be coordinated and improved - both now and in the future.

Provisional Agenda – Thursday 30th March 2017

8.30 – 9.00	Registration of participants
9.00 – 9.10	Welcome and introductory remarks: Mario Milouchev, Director DG AGRI. Paul Soto Team Leader ENRD Contact Point.
9.10 – 9.30	Keynote: Opportunities for business innovation in today's rapidly changing rural world: José-Enrique Garcilazo, Head of Unit Rural Programme, OECD, Paris.
9.30 – 11.00	<p>Plenary: Looking at innovation policies through a rural lens</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Smart Specialisation, Digitisation, Social Innovation. 3 inspiring practical examples of how rural communities and businesses are putting into place innovative solutions.</i> • <i>Policy panel with representatives from different EU programmes. How to ensure EU policies reach and are useful for rural businesses?</i>
11.00 – 11.30	Coffee
11.30 – 13.00	<p>Parallel workshops. Making support tools for business innovation work in rural areas.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Rural Digital Hubs. <i>How to ensure that they successfully help rural businesses seize the opportunities of digitisation?</i> 2. Rural business accelerator programmes. <i>How to encourage new ideas- from farm and non- farm businesses - and get them successfully to the market?</i> 3. Social innovation in rural areas. <i>How to build capacity, mobilise resources and generate new economic activities?</i>
13.00 – 14.00	Lunch
14.00 – 15.30	<p>Parallel workshops: Improving smart business support through the RDPs</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Extending business innovation through LEADER (M19). <i>How can LAGs be enabled to provide more effective support to promising but potentially risky new business ideas and projects.</i> 2. Extending business innovation through cooperation (M.16). <i>How can the cooperation measure be made more effective in supporting business ideas get to the market?</i> 3. Using the RDPs to implement smart business support packages. <i>How can key measures in the RDPs best be combined to support innovation among both farm and non-farm businesses?</i>
15.30 – 16.00	Coffee
16.00 – 16.30	<p>Final Plenary and Next Steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback from workshops and closing comments