MAIN STORY

SMART COMMUNICATIONS:
BETTER RURAL DEVELOPMENT
Dear Reader,

Spring is in the air in this edition of the ENRD Magazine. And at the onset of the new period for the Common Agricultural Policy we reveal plenty of fresh ideas flourishing in the network.

To start with we focus on communications. When telling the story of rural development, be ambitious, know your target audience and avoid jargon. These were some of the lessons from March’s ENRD Seminar on Communicating Rural Development. The event built on the peer-to-peer exchange sessions the ENRD organises and it let the network share valuable experience about the ever-changing communications environment. The new NRN requirement to engage more actively with the general public was avidly discussed at the seminar and it is also the topic of our Rural Focus section.

In this time of new beginnings, the Over to You section covers an innovative Luxembourgish-German initiative to create the first ever transnational LAG. This ambitious project has moved a step closer to reality. Is it a sign of things to come? Looking back can help us to move forward in the right direction. In the same section we profile the French network’s Panorama project which places the achievements of the 2007-2013 period in a context that can aid future strategy.

The times may be a-changin’, but as ever, the ENRD Report, NRN Focus and LEADER in Action provide a full round-up of network activities. We also feature some great EAFRD projects, including an initiative to monitor groundwater use by Maltese farmers, and we tell the inside story behind rural development communications products from Bulgaria and Sweden.

So, as the new period kicks off, we’re glad to report that the network is inspired, reenergised and ready to begin the next chapter in the rural development story.
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*Cooking together in the Netherlands; a moment from a long running Transnational Cooperation project about short supply chains for local food across Europe. Read all about it on page 28.*
The European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) is the hub that connects rural development stakeholders throughout the European Union. Read all about our latest activities.

The EAFRD directly serves almost 300 million Europeans living in rural areas and all EU citizens benefit from the products and public goods provided by rural areas. As a new programming period dawns, how is the network - from the smallest LAG through to the European Commission - planning to ensure that more people find out about the great opportunities to get involved in rural development? And looking beyond beneficiaries, how should the wider societal value of the CAP be communicated?

On 3-4 March 2014, the ENRD, in partnership with the Lithuanian National Rural Network, held a seminar on how to best communicate rural development. The event built on recent communications-related peer-to-peer networking events, and brought over 130 people from 25 countries together.

The Vilnius event allowed the network to share valuable experience from the previous programming period and address the ever-changing communications environment. The way in which people receive information now is very different to the onset of the last period: social media channels such as Twitter were in their infancy and Instagram, Pinterest, and the iPad were unheard of. Yet despite the increasing - and sometimes bewildering - range of communications channels and tools, the core challenge remains the same: to make the message relevant, interesting and easy to understand.

Participants hard at work during the ENRD Seminar on Communicating Rural Development.
Say it loud and clear!

The workshop on communicating rural development with the broader public explored how resources, including rural networks, can be best exploited to enhance the engagement with the general public. It also delved into the messages that need to be conveyed when explaining the benefits of rural development policy more widely. Inspired by case studies from initiatives such as LEADER, the Baltic Foundation and the CAP communications campaign, the workshop discussion focused on:

- **Getting the message right**: Care is needed to develop relevant messages. Getting the tone right means avoiding jargon and ‘speaking the language’ of the audience. Credible stories and clear language need to be matched to the audience needs.

- **Getting the mix right**: Energy should be invested in multi-purpose content; use a mix of channels to maximise the impact of the message - from social media and video to careful coordination with potential multipliers, such as media and policy networks.

- **Targeting**: Define target audiences carefully and then select the channels used to reach them accordingly.

- **Making a difference**: Communication is a two-way street. By providing a practical feedback loop to policy-makers, implementing bodies and project teams, engagement is deepened and may even induce systemic change.

What EAFRD benefits should be communicated widely?

“It’s about quality of life: rural development helps people to live better in their own communities”

Luís Chaves, MINHA TERRA – Portuguese Federation of Local Development Associations

“Communication should be about people…”

Alistair Prior, Scottish Rural Network

“You need to have a good story to tell; communication without heart is empty.”

Antonella Zona, European Commission

A wealth of examples and experiences were presented throughout the seminar. Following the opening plenary session, a series of sessions dedicated to storytelling, intercultural communication, deploying digital media, and the role of networks and rural parliaments took place. Participants left the seminar feeling inspired and energised, as Steve Jackson from the Welsh Rural Network noted, “I’m going back with a big list of jobs to do...”

The practitioners present cited many examples - from all corners of Europe - covering all types of communications products. For more information about the event, including presentations, outcome reports and videos, see the ENRD website:


Effective communication

Many years ago the playwright George Bernard Shaw said, “the single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.” Today, assessing and evaluating communications activity remains as challenging as ever. The participants in the workshop on ‘Effectiveness of communication tools’ highlighted the need to:

- Define what is meant by effective communication: To evaluate the communications effort measurable benchmarks have first to be set. Use established practices and avoid performing evaluation in isolation. Don’t be afraid of negative feedback.
- Focus on meaningful evaluation: Evaluate over time; keep it simple; use informal feedback (numbers are not always needed); employ readily-available online tools (from web analytics to surveys to questionnaires). Use multi-level evaluation if possible.
- Use the results: Evaluation of communication tools should lead to improvement and is therefore a vital part of the communications cycle. Use the results to review the communications plan. Share the feedback and make it transparent.

CAP Communication Awards

Excellent communication was honoured at the CAP Communications Awards in December. Preselected by an independent jury, the nominees were given the opportunity to present their projects to over 400 communications and CAP experts at the Awards Ceremony in Brussels on 9 December 2013.

Awards were given to campaigns targeting: stakeholders; the public; and innovative communication. In addition a special jury prize and people’s choice prize were awarded.

Unións Agrarias-UPA from Spain was the winner of the communications to the public award. The campaign drew citizens' attention to the benefits of the CAP and provided information about the role of agriculture in the world. The jury noted that this excellent project’s, "emphasis on taking the farm to the public, and not the reverse, makes this project especially unique."

Congratulations to all the winners whose work can be seen at: http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/cap-communication-network/awards/winners-2013/index_en.htm
Action plan for thriving organic sector

Once a niche domain, today organic produce is part of the mainstream consumer’s shopping basket. To ensure that the sector continues to develop - it has quadrupled in size over the last 10 years - the EU is updating its policy framework. In March the European Commission published a proposal for a new regulation on organic production and the labelling of organic products. The proposal focuses on three main objectives: maintaining consumer confidence, maintaining producer confidence and making it easier for farmers to switch to organics.

The Commission has at the same time adopted an Action Plan on the future of Organic Production in Europe. It will inform organic farmers, producers and retailers about rural development and farm policy initiatives that support the sector, strengthen links between EU research and innovation projects and organic production, encourage the use of organic food, for example in schools, and increase awareness on the EU logo.

The European Commission’s recently revamped organic farming website - www.organic-farming.eu - is an excellent resource. For consumers, there is information on what makes products organic, and how to recognise these when shopping. For producers, there is a guide to EU policy updates, information on available funding and a resource library - with images, logos and brochures - to help promote produce and practices.

The easily identifiable EU organic logo is a customer guarantee that organic products have been produced according to strict rules respecting the environment and animal welfare.

Concluding seminar for RURBAN initiative

The final seminar of the preparatory RURBAN initiative to analyse and identify the advantages of enhanced rural-urban cooperation was held in Brussels on 28 January 2014. The insights generated by RURBAN - the partnership for sustainable urban-rural development - are used to inform the new programming period for the European Regional Development Fund and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development.

Both Jerzy Plewa, Director-General, Directorate-General Agriculture and Rural Development and Walter Deffaa, Director-General, Directorate-General Regional and Urban Policy, emphasised the added value of cooperation. The seminar, which was moderated by Jan Olbrycht, MEP and chair of the Urban Intergroup of the European Parliament, concluded that the EU is committed to working together with countries, regions and other partners to promote stronger urban-rural linkages.

The 2014-2020 programming period is set to be characterised by a more coherent approach to rural-urban development. The benefits of enhanced cooperation can include more efficient land use and planning, better provision of services, such as public transport or health, and better management of natural resources. For more about the RURBAN initiative: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/what/cohesion/urban_rural/index_en.cfm
Demographic change and declining rural populations pose a challenge to the vitality of rural areas. Future prospects depend on the younger population. The ENRD is actively helping to identify and understand what works well and less well when implementing programmes for young farmers and rural youth. This includes exploring ways in which young people can be involved in the design and implementation of rural development policy at EU, national and regional level. The ENRD also raises awareness about the full range of support options offered by rural development policy. A short roundup of recent youth-related ENRD activity follows.

**Youth and Young Farmers Gateway**

The Youth and Young Farmers Gateway provides a single point of access to thematic information about young farmers and youth in rural areas. The recently redesigned gateway includes a library about youth projects, contact details of rural and youth stakeholders and links to EU official resources. Activities are showcased through videos and case studies.


**Youth and Young Farmers’ Workshop**

The 28 EU Member States were represented at the Youth and Young Farmers Workshop organised by the ENRD in December 2013. Over 160 participants spoke about their experiences developing youth-focused projects in rural areas. Projects about topics such as entrepreneurship, mobility and organic wine production were presented at the workshop. The young participants engaged with policy-makers during visits to the European Parliament and the European Commission.

The future of smart, inclusive and sustainable development of rural areas pivots around the entrepreneurship and creativity of youth. This sentiment was echoed in the closing remarks of José Manuel Sousa Uva from the European Commission.


**Youth video competition**

The ENRD set a challenge to Europe’s rural youth: capture the spirit of your rural experience in a three-minute film. Between December 2013 and February 2014, entries rolled in. The quality of submissions was superb. The entries were posted on the ENRD Facebook page, and the rural development community could vote for their favourite by ‘liking’ it.

The worthy winners were the students of the Saengerstadt Gymnasium from Finsterwalde in Eastern Germany. Their film ‘The Eternal Cycle’, comments on the appeal of rural living for the young. All the videos, including the winning entry, are available online.


ENRD Facebook page: [https://www.facebook.com/pages/European-Network-for-Rural-Development-ENRD/388192661294192](https://www.facebook.com/pages/European-Network-for-Rural-Development-ENRD/388192661294192)

**Thematic initiative on youth**

The ENRD thematic initiative on Youth and Young Farmers in rural areas was launched in December 2012. The purpose was to reflect on the best ways that these groups could benefit from rural development support. The initiative published a draft report, outlining a number of valuable conclusions and recommendations and the final report will be published on the Gateway by June 2014.


Networking about rural youth

© ENRD Contact Point
At the onset of the new programming period, the ENRD organised a seminar about the successful implementation of Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) on 29 January 2014 in Brussels. Speaking at the event, Dacian Cioloş, the European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, noted that it was, “an important moment for the preparation of Rural Development Programmes since now is the time for translating the new policy into successful practical instruments.” The Commissioner urged all stakeholders to create a sense of shared ownership of the RDPs, emphasising the need to encourage simplicity, rather than complexity, in implementation.

Bringing together rural development administrators and organisations around Europe, the event provided guidance on a spectrum of implementation issues. Given that some 117 new RDPs are expected in the 2014-2020 period, the meeting was timely. The European Commission was present to provide specific advice; in addition, there was the opportunity for peer-to-peer learning and knowledge exchange between Member State authorities, drawing on their experience from previous programming.

The event was themed around innovation, environmental sustainability, climate action and territorial development. These formed the basis for a series of parallel interactive workshops, examining different aspects of implementation.

Workshop 1 was dedicated to cooperation, knowledge transfer and innovation. It highlighted the need to determine what farmers really need from RDP support and how to best collect and communicate that information. Workshop 2 examined how to maximise the environmental and climate benefits from the measures available under both CAP Pillars. New tools are now available, such as better land management through forestry and specific support to organic farming, which can provide efficient, innovative ways of improving environmental outcomes.

Workshop 3 examined territorial approaches to implementation. It concluded that stakeholder communication and cooperation on policy issues were important for effective harmonisation of territorial intervention. It also noted that flexibility in the RDP measures makes it easier to involve new stakeholders in rural development initiatives. A full report on the seminar is available from the ENRD website.

12th Coordination Committee

The 12th ENRD Coordination Committee meeting took place in Brussels the day before the seminar. José Manuel Sousa Uva, Director, DG Agriculture and Rural Development, welcomed attendees to the first meeting since the adoption of the CAP Reform.

Amongst the topics covered at the meeting were the importance of evaluation of RDPs and the need to reduce errors in implementation, which was the subject of a panel discussion, and the specific challenge for networks in transition to the new 2014-2020 programming period, which was also thoroughly discussed. The ENRD Contact Point gave an overview of progress to date and network support units from Scotland, France and Austria shared their experiences of transition.

References
Seminar on successful implementation

12th Coordination Committee
Networking for innovation in 2014-2020

Innovation is embedded as a cross-cutting rural development policy objective that must be integrated as a priority in all Member State Rural Development Programmes. So how should rural stakeholders address these requirements in practice and how can networking help? These were the questions the Flemish Rural Network (Vlaams Ruraal Network – VRN) set out to answer at a well-attended peer-to-peer event in Ghent, Belgium.

With the support of the ENRD Contact Point and the EIP-AGRI Service Point, the VRN organised the training workshop in March, gathering rural networks from different Member States. The workshop agenda was shaped by a Virtual Think Tank organised prior to the workshop. “We created an online meeting space where stakeholders could explore what they needed to learn about in order to be able to optimise their respective networks’ ability to foster innovation,” explains Marina Brakalova of the ENRD Contact Point. The discussion proved to be very useful in guiding the workshop content.

At the workshop there was an explanation of the new innovation landscape. The ENRD Contact Point and the EIP-AGRI Service Point described the support available to NRNs and network support units. Participants then brainstormed about how rural networks can contribute to a culture of innovation amongst all rural stakeholders. Best practices were showcased by selected participants and group discussions helped to identify practical ways to integrate innovation into network activities.

“The workshop had the right balance of sharing, learning and planning,” said Nele Vanslembrouck of the VRN. “Participants ended up with a clear understanding of what they need to do and they left with useful ideas.”

Climate action: good practices highlighted

In February, the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development and the Cyprus National Rural Network teamed up to organise a workshop entitled, ‘Climate change mitigation and adaptation in RDPs: assessing the scope and measuring the outcomes’. Climate action remains a cross-cutting priority for rural development in the 2014-2020 period. Seventy representatives of national and regional authorities, NRNs, academics, researchers and evaluators took part in the event which was held in Larnaca, Cyprus.

The workshop covered both programming and evaluation aspects. Several challenges were raised during workshop discussions. For example, there are possible conflicts between climate-related priorities and other priorities such as biodiversity conservation. Other challenges include the need to quantify climate change targets, the gaps in the monitoring and evaluation methodology and the indicators’ ability to capture the impact of climate-related action.

In response, participants shared insights and practical examples, including the results of an interactive mapping exercise that showed how climate-change adaptation and mitigation activities can be assessed. The ENRD Contact Point’s 2010 screening exercise to identify how the issue of climate change is being tackled in the RDPs at Member State level helped to feed the discussion.

References

Report on workshop
ENRD synthesis report on climate action
Bringing high-speed broadband to rural Europe

Access to broadband is today as essential as access to electricity and roads. But rolling out high-speed broadband to rural areas can be challenging. The ENGAGE project was set up to find solutions. “At ENGAGE, we focus on finding the best economic models for developing very high-speed broadband infrastructure in less populated regions. Our aim is to ensure that all of Europe’s communities and citizens can contribute to and benefit from the digital revolution,” explains the project’s manager, Clive Peckham.

ENGAGE presented its proposals to an audience of rural, regional and digital policy decision-makers from the European institutions at a Brussels conference in January 2014. The goal of high-speed rural broadband is relevant to the new RDPs expected for the 2014-2020 programming period. ENGAGE is funded by the INTERREG IVC programme and involves public partners from 11 European regions. For more information go to: [http://engage-interreg.eu](http://engage-interreg.eu)

**ENGAGE’s broadband proposals:**

- A European Rural (or regional) Internet Platform of local authorities to promote the ENGAGE vision and solutions to European institutions and stakeholders.
- A European Rural Internet Observatory to map, plan and report on the development of high-speed broadband services in rural regions.
- A Rural Internet Task Force to integrate the experience of leading local authorities with technical experts from across Europe to encourage viable local solutions.

**CAP Reform: regulations published**

The four basic EU regulations of the new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) were published in the Official Journal on 20 December 2013. These four legislative texts reflect the political agreement between the European Commission, EU Member States Agriculture Ministers (in the Council) and the European Parliament. With these new rules, the vast majority of CAP legislation will be defined under four consecutive Regulations – a significant simplification – covering rural development, horizontal issues such as funding and controls, direct payments and market measures.

Global Forum for Food and Agriculture

The Global Forum for Food and Agriculture (GFFA) is an international conference that was held during International Green Week in Berlin in January. This year's edition focused on how agriculture and rural areas can cope more effectively with economical, ecological and social challenges and crises, such as production risks and market disruption, the degradation of natural resources and climate change, whilst at the same time performing their central task of ensuring food security.

High-level representatives from politics, business, science and civil society discussed the topic in front of 1400 international guests. A ‘cooperation market’ offered associations, companies, universities, international organisations and the German Federal Ministry for Agriculture a platform to showcase their activities in the agricultural and rural development sector. The European Commission, represented by the Directorate-General for Agricultural and Rural Development and the Directorate-General for Enlargement participated in this market for the first time.

The European Commission's stand at the cooperation market was used to promote the Common Agricultural Policy and, in particular, rural development and the ENRD. The EU Rural Review #17 on family farming was the subject of much attention, with 2014 being the UN-designated International Year of Family Farming.

Supporting NRN evaluation and self-assessment

National Rural Network (NRN) evaluation and self-assessment serve different purposes. NRNs are subject to evaluation in order to demonstrate their contribution to the EU rural development objectives. Self-assessment is a process whereby NRNs assess their own operations on an on-going basis, in order to improve overall effectiveness and to encourage informed decision-making when planning future activities. Gaining practical knowledge about self-assessment, network evaluation, RDP evaluation and the dissemination of findings is particularly pertinent under the new rural development regulation.

The rural development community is therefore being actively supported to ensure that evaluation and self-assessment procedures are put in place throughout the network and that the expected results are being delivered. In April, the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development (EEN) organised a workshop in Rome to share good practice in NRNs evaluation. The event brought together evaluation experts, NRNs and Managing Authorities.

Building on the results of the EEN workshop, the 21st NRN meeting and peer-to-peer training, held in the UK in May, was designed to promote understanding of self-assessment methodologies with a special focus on NRN evaluation as part of the formal evaluation of Rural Development Programmes. The peer-to-peer exchange deepened knowledge regarding the intervention logic needed, while helping to identify practical ways to address key challenges of network assessment.

References

Global Forum for Food and Agriculture 2014
http://www.gffa-berlin.de/en

International Green Week
http://www.gruenewoche.de/en/

EU Rural Review #17
http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/publications-and-media/eu-rural-review

EEN Good Practice Workshop

Outcomes from the 21st NRN meeting

ENRD peer-to-peer exchange on evaluation
Germany: **Focusing on youth participation in rural areas**

The winners of the 2013 edition of the German NRN’s competition that recognises active participation in rural development were announced during International Green Week in Berlin in January 2014. This year the annual competition, which was first launched in 2010, focused on the role of youth participation. Some 23 projects were nominated and voting took place online via the NRN’s website with those voting being asked to consider whether the project was truly a youth-driven initiative and if the project was an important part of LEADER activity in the region.

The winner was the ‘Generation Network Berngau’ project from Bavaria - an initiative that establishes links between young and old, local people and newcomers to the region. Teenagers from the region developed a video to introduce the area to new residents of the town. As Hanns-Christoph Eiden, President of the Federal Agency for Agriculture and Food, noted, “young people have a lot of good ideas that can benefit rural areas.”

Further information and a video of the awards ceremony are available from: [www.netzwerk-laendlicher-raum.de/beispiele/wettbewerb-2013](http://www.netzwerk-laendlicher-raum.de/beispiele/wettbewerb-2013)
Finland: Fishing for pearls to highlight value of rural development

The Rural Best Practice Awards are a really important way for us to highlight the successes of the Rural Development Programme and to raise awareness of the opportunities that are available to rural people, businesses and communities,” notes Kirsi Hakoniemi from the Network Support Unit of Finland. The third biennial Finnish NRN best practice competition was launched in February and is open to projects that have received support via the 2007-2013 Finnish RDP. Entrants have to submit a case study to the NRN’s database, thus helping to spread the word about high quality projects that have been developed. Short films are to be prepared for each of the finalists in the five competition categories (young people; cooperation; environment and climate; culture; and economic development and entrepreneurship). The films will be disseminated via the NRN’s YouTube channel (www.youtube.com/maaseutuverkosto). The winners will be announced at a Rural Gala in Lahti in October. Further information is available from www.maasetu.fi.
Belgium – Wallonia: **Looking into the future of rural areas**

On 3 February 2014 the Walloon Rural Network published Rural Wallonia Towards 2040, an ambitious document that considers different possible future scenarios for the area’s rural communities. The working group that prepared the publication considered key issues that will face the people of rural Wallonia in the medium to long term, including demographics and housing, agriculture, energy use, natural resources and mobility. The impacts of national and global pressures and opportunities were also analysed.

The report concludes that change is inevitable and that the ability to anticipate and manage it will determine the future of Wallonia’s rural areas. The value of natural resources will rise linked to future food and energy production, in addition to the role they play in health and wellbeing. Increased research, development and innovation capacity, alongside a more proactive approach to preserving natural resources from threats such as urbanisation are also seen as vital.

Xavier Delmon from the Walloon network hopes that the publication, “helps stimulate debate about the role of rural Wallonia as we look ahead to the next 25 years. It will certainly inform the preparation of the 2014-2020 programming period and enable our rural areas to adapt to change.”

Further information is available from: [www.reseau-pwdr.be](http://www.reseau-pwdr.be)

Ireland: **Rounding up 2007-2013 network highlights**

In light of the completion of the Rural Development Programme for the programming period 2007-2013, the Irish National Rural Network recently published its final newsletter. The newsletter reflects on the work of the NRN over the last seven years and includes informative articles on a wide range of topics including rural enterprise and community development.

Whilst the Irish NRN is not operational at present, the website remains accessible. One of the NRN’s final publications was a case study on women in agriculture, which highlights routes into farming for women and the barriers that still exist. Other notable reports include one on the Impact of Ireland’s LEADER Programme. A report on ‘Farm Level Actions to Reduce Climate Change Impacts’ recommends that farmers are helped to understand the impacts of their actions on climate change and supported to make steady improvements instead of being forced to meet targets. A so-called carbon navigator tool is mentioned as a good way to address farmers’ misunderstandings about greenhouse gases and climate change.

Further information on the publications above and other best practice case studies and research reports remain available from [www.nrn.ie](http://www.nrn.ie)
Portugal: NRN develops aromatic and medicinal plant network

Two member organisations of the Portuguese NRN (Rede Rural Nacional) have established an initiative to aid the development of the aromatic and medicinal plant sector in Portugal. The aim is to establish a national network for the sector, promote entrepreneurship, develop skills and disseminate knowledge.

Already the network project, known as EPAM, has created a database of over 50 producers and other agents active in the sector and has organised 17 national and local meetings and developed transnational links with likeminded groups in Spain and Italy. The network’s sectoral workshops, held by its members, are proving to be popular: in February and March 2014 five events were held, covering topics from the production of herbs to essential oil extraction methods.

Ana Pires da Silva from the Portuguese NRN notes that, “EPAM is an excellent example of how networking can disseminate good practice and raise both knowledge and skills within a sector.” More information is available from: www.epam.pt

Sweden: Improving the competitiveness of local food producers

A report published by the Swedish NRN in February 2014 details the findings from a survey of dietary and purchasing managers in municipalities and county councils. The findings highlighted the importance of food producers meeting a variety of quality controls including animal welfare standards, antibiotic-free meat and organic production.

“We have a situation where the Swedish politicians set up rules and regulations which are not fully enforced in public procurement,” explains Sofia Lindblad, chair of the NRN’s working group which produced the report, adding, “we undertook this work in order to have a mutual understanding of the different needs of the public sector and of producers, regarding quality of food in public canteens.”

A series of dialogue meetings were subsequently held across Sweden during April 2014, in order to connect food producers with policy-makers and public sector food procurement managers. The aim is to improve local producers’ understanding of their potential public sector clients’ requirements - that is the rules applying to organisations such as nursery schools, hospitals and nursing homes - so that local producers are in a position to actively compete for supply contracts.

Further information is available from: www.landsbygdsnaturverket.se/livsmedelskvalitet.
**Latvia: Promoting inspiring rural projects**

On 30 January 2014, at a LAG Seminar in Salacgrīvas County, the Latvian Rural Forum announced the winners of its annual competition to identify good practice in rural development. Anita Selick from the Latvian Rural Forum notes that there was, “a very good response to our awards this year with 16 excellent projects nominated. We promoted information about all of the projects on social networks in order to spread good practice which is a very important aspect of these awards – letting people know about activities to inspire and encourage others with practical ideas.”

The overall winner, selected by a jury of LAGs and board members of the first Latvian Rural Communities Parliament, was the Pauls Sukatnieks Viticulture and Breeding Centre from Dviete in south-east Latvia. This project has reinvigorated an old estate linked to a famous plant breeder and writer and has brought it to life as a centre of excellence for wine and grape vine breeding. The estate house now holds a library of documents about viticulture and the poetry of Pauls Sukatnieks and the garden has been fully restored using equipment purchased by the project.

Further information on the awards and all of the nominees is available from: [http://laukuforums.lv](http://laukuforums.lv)

**Italy: NRN workshop on supporting a low-carbon food industry**

On 13 March 2014, more than 170 stakeholders from NRN partners, government institutions, universities and research organisations attended a workshop in Rome organised by Rete Rurale - the Italian NRN - about the contribution of the 2014-2020 RDP to the efficient use of resources and the transition to a low-carbon economy in the food industry.

“We were delighted to be able to hold such an event for the agri-food sector. This is an area that we think will be very important in the implementation of the Rural Development Programme for 2014-2020,” explains Camillo Zaccarini Bonelli of the NRN, who chaired the event.

Delegates first heard presentations on climate indicators and the strategic framework for support from Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies representatives. These were followed by sessions covering practical ways to monitor and reduce emissions at both regional and farm levels. One of these saw Federico Chiani from Rete Rurale present the NRN’s findings on the effectiveness of agri-environment measures in a paper titled, Carbon footprint: State of the art work on the estimations of impacts of emissions at the level of the farm.

Further information is available from [www.reterurale.it](http://www.reterurale.it)
Sweden: Using Twitter to reach further

The Swedish National Rural Network has been using Twitter, the online social networking and microblogging service, since 2009 in order to connect with people sharing a similar interest in rural development. The main purpose of the account is to build and maintain an online network that can promote Swedish rural development. The Twitter channel (https://twitter.com/Landsbygdsnativo) is proving to be influential - it has around 750 followers - and it also complements the NRN’s existing social media presence.

Communicating Rural Development

The ENRD’s online Communicating Rural Development (CRD) Gateway celebrates excellence in communication. Here, we delve into some great examples from Sweden and Bulgaria...

The inside story

Tommy Nilsson, information officer with the Swedish NRN, outlines how Twitter fits into the communications mix:

Why did you decide to create a twitter account? “Good communications is a two-way process and Twitter is a great way to achieve it. Twitter is characterised by speed and this contributes something new to the delivery of our communication strategy.

We use it primarily to target journalists, policy-makers and to those who are actively interested in communicating rural development. The channel supports our ongoing awareness-raising work and it is also very useful indicator of trending topics for the rural development community.”

What are the challenges and opportunities of using this channel? “As part of the Managing Authority, we must be sure that our work on Twitter is aligned with communications policy and we have a responsibility to moderate comments, but there are no major challenges. However the benefits are clear, it’s free-of-charge, quick and easy-to-use and it reaches influential groups.”

How does Twitter fit with the rest of your communication activities? “Twitter complements our existing communications channels. It adds to our outreach potential but it will never be a replacement for a phone call or an email sent directly to a journalist or a stakeholder. Whereas Facebook is good for targeting a broader public audience, on Twitter, we have a more specialised target group following us.

Twitter can be a busy marketplace, so it takes time and commitment to get your voice heard. We tend to use it selectively around specific activities. In our experience coordinating the use of Twitter hashtags with members of the rural network helps move the twittersphere towards the topic you wish to share. In this way we can support an initiative we are performing elsewhere. For example, at our annual rural gala, we announce the winners live on twitter. At last November’s event we launched the hashtag #lbgalan and during the ceremony live tweets were visible on a big screen.”

Does Twitter support your efforts to communicate with the general public? “For us, Twitter is not the primary channel we use to reach out to the general public. We target influential stakeholders, such as journalists, who are potential multipliers of positive messages about rural development.”
Bulgaria: Smart website design increases engagement

In 2013, the Bulgarian Network Support Unit (NSU) relaunched the National Rural Network website. The project was an opportunity to better address the evolving needs of the network and to improve the technical performance of the website. In designing the new-look site the NSU undertook best practice benchmarking of NRN websites ([http://www.nsm.bg](http://www.nsm.bg)). One year on, the website’s popularity has increased rapidly and the network is better able to serve the Bulgarian rural development community.

The inside story

Maria Topchieva, Coordinator of the Bulgarian NSU, tells the story behind the relaunch of the NRN website:

Why did you decide to redesign the NRN website? “Our network support unit began operations in December 2012, at which time the NRN did not have a consistent communications presence. Therefore, we wanted to have a site that best serves the network and one that we could manage efficiently within our small team. The challenge was to set up and run the new website, while building on previous activities.”

What are the main website features? “We have four main categories of information on the website. Firstly, we provide the latest news about rural development in Bulgaria and the EU through the dynamic and regularly updated news sections. Secondly, specific information about the latest NRN activities provides opportunities for members to participate. We also maintain a number of databases that provide practical information. These include our RDP database, which highlights good practice according to criteria such as efficiency, sustainability, innovation and so on. Fourthly, we provide general information about the main principles, terms and conditions of rural development policy, which is of particular value to the broader public.”

How is the website performing? “The website is essential to the core activity of the NRN. We monitor several website performance indicators, such as unique website visits per day, average visit duration, etc. This information allows us to understand the profile of website visitors, readers’ preferences and trends. The website’s popularity is reflected in the growing percentage of returning visitors (62.8%). The sections of the website generating most traffic are the news, events, library and thematic working groups.”

What were the lessons learnt when creating the website? “Knowledge of the environment and target audience is crucial. Amongst our first steps was engagement with our community to get their feedback on a new NRN slogan. The results allowed us to select the one we use today, which translates as ‘together for people and rural areas’. We also conducted an online survey to gather feedback about the website’s functionality and I’m glad to report that a high percentage of positive replies were obtained. It is important to take care when developing the structure and messaging. As a guiding principal, keep things as simple as possible. This is especially relevant for the content - messages need to be understandable for rural stakeholders. And finally, don’t forget that a website takes time to become established, so be sure to allocate adequate resources for daily maintenance.”
EU Rural Review #18: Organic Farming

For an in-depth review of the EU’s organic sector, which now has an annual turnover of around €20 billion, check out the latest edition of the EU Rural Review:

Images of Organic Farming

For an in-depth review of the EU’s organic sector, which now has an annual turnover of around €20 billion, check out the latest edition of the EU Rural Review: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/publications-and-media/eu-rural-review/en/eu-rural-review_en.cfm

Fresh from the field

This picture of a tasty organic vegetable assortment is just one of many great images available to download from the European Commission’s user-friendly website all about organic production: www.organic-farming.europa.eu
Over the past two decades cooperation between German and Luxembourgish communes in the Moselle Valley has increased considerably. This spirit has also been reflected in the work of the local LEADER groups, who are looking to create a first ever transnational Local Action Group (LAG).

Many residents of German communes in the Moselle Valley work in Luxembourg, while many Luxembourgers live across the border, in Germany, so issues of common interest are often dealt with through cross-border initiatives.

Some of these initiatives are of a long-term nature, such as the German-Luxembourgish tourist office at Wasserbilligerbrück, or initiatives in the field of wastewater treatment or water supply. Certain wine-related and cultural events and tourist projects are also jointly planned and organised.

In this context, the two LEADER groups of Moselfranken (Germany) and Miselerland (Luxembourg) signed a general cooperation agreement in 2008, which has led to successful collaborations in the framework of projects such as ‘Route of the Romans’, ‘Terroir Moselle’ or ‘Bikes without borders’.

With preparations now underway for the new LEADER programme for 2014-2020, both LAGs are keen to build on these achievements and take their cooperation a step further. In what could soon be a first for Europe, discussions to create a common transnational LAG are under way which would involve the fusion of the Miselerland and Moselfranken LEADER areas.

Local support

An initial survey of members of both LEADER groups has revealed broad support for the creation of such a transnational LAG. However, a number of hurdles remain to be overcome.

Member delegations and management of both LAGs recently met with the officers in charge of LEADER in Rhineland-Palatinate and Luxembourg in order to gauge their attitude to a common transnational LAG.
Over to You: Luxembourg and Germany!

As Philippe Eschenauer, manager of the Miselerland LAG explains, “their main concern is that there is currently no legal basis or no harmonised rules for the administration of a transnational LAG, so it seems that we would initially have to keep both our LAGs for financial and administrative purposes and create a new, common entity - maybe in the form of a European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation - that would coordinate the other aspects. Our national and regional authorities assure us that they want to help find long-term solutions to these issues, however, and they suggested that we write a common development strategy for both our regions, to be submitted to the authorities in Germany and Luxembourg.”

In order to develop this common strategy, two joint workshops, involving about 60 participants from both LAG areas, were held in March and April 2014. The venue for both workshops was a boat on the river Moselle, which forms the natural border between the two LAGs. “It’s symbolic,” says Mr Eschenauer, “after decades of separating us, the Moselle is finally unifying us!”

Potential advantages

The LAGs see a number of potential benefits to creating a transnational body. Firstly, its innovative nature would give the LAG a distinct advantage in the LAG selection process for the new LEADER period. This aspect is also expected to attract considerable outside interest, which could open up new opportunities for the region and its inhabitants.

Collaboration within the framework of a common management structure, the necessary exchange among the Luxembourgish and German members of the LAG, regular meetings of partners from the two countries, and a common concept of development are also expected to generate new project ideas and nurture a better understanding between communities on either side of the Moselle.

There could also be important financial benefits. “In general, a higher subsidy rate is given to transnational projects, and a transnational LAG could open the way to other sources of funding, such as from the instrument for European Territorial Cooperation (formerly INTERREG),” Mr Eschenauer suggests.

A model region for rural and urban development

If successful, the new LAG could provide an interesting model for other cross-border areas faced with similar challenges. Located between the urban centres of Trier and Luxembourg, the relationship between urban and rural development is an important factor in the Miselerland-Moselfranken area, in addition to the challenge of operating in a border area. The creation of a transnational LAG is an innovative attempt to respond to these challenges and to establish a common platform for the future.
The French rural network recently came together en masse to capture lessons learnt from the past and to focus on a dynamic future for rural areas. The participants left re-energised and ready for the challenge ahead...

Hundreds of participants gathered in Dijon for the two-day national seminar for French rural networks, which took place in November 2013. The theme linking the many event activities was how rural territories can shape their futures, with a special focus on innovation in a rural-urban context.

Rural dynamic

Whilst the growth of urban centres attracts continued political attention, it is important not to overlook rural dynamics. Thus the event was an occasion to imagine ambitious public policies that support smart territorial development. The seminar also took stock of and highlighted the rural network’s impact since 2009. It assessed these achievements through the filter of the EU’s Europe 2020 strategy, and in particular considered how this should be translated into action in the 2014-2020 programming period. Debates, roundtable meetings, thematic forums, exhibitions, video screenings and the ‘innovation village’ showcased the strengths of the rural network, and the depth and breadth of rural vitality.

A strong mobilisation

In all, the event brought more than 600 people together. LEADER LAGs; association officials; elected representatives; rural experts and so on. The majority of the participants were actors who are directly involved in innovative projects in the rural world. More than 150 of them are involved in Local Action Groups (LAGs). Several elected officials from the 17 regional councils and 16 Regional Rural Networks were present. Many national organisations also took part, including the network of the Chambers of Agriculture, trade unions and representatives of local, regional and national government.

European interest

A strong European presence saw delegations from 18 Member States participate in the seminar. In addition, the EU level was represented by the ENRD Contact Point, the European Commission and MEP Eric Andrieu. The delegations also attended the 20th National Rural Network meeting, which was organised to coincide with the seminar.

The meeting was organised in the Dijon Congress Palace and the evening reception, which was hosted by the City of Dijon, allowed for a convivial atmosphere, typical of Burgundy.
Panorama 2007-2013

The network support unit of the French NRN recently undertook an impressive stocktaking of projects delivered during the 2007-2013 programming period, at regional and national levels. The published results highlight the scope and ambition of the rural development policy. The publication, which was disseminated at the Dijon seminar, stimulated reflection by the rural development stakeholders present.

The projects are presented by themes, which correspond to the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Each theme is explained through the related challenges and the methodologies used to answer them. The themes are illustrated by 48 project case studies.

The selected examples are geographically, thematically and methodologically diverse, so as to increase the relevance of the findings to a maximum number of rural development stakeholders. The publication illustrates perfectly the depth of the rural network and it concludes that the French rural network supported new stakeholder partnerships in rural areas during the period and that such multi-sectoral coordination was of value in analysing rural challenges.

Without claiming to be exhaustive, Panorama 2007-2013 reveals the diversity of actions and illustrates the results produced by the network. For more information about the publication contact Julia Manaquin from the French NRN's national support unit - j.manaquin@rct-territoires.com


A framework for rural development analysis

The Panorama capitalisation process groups the diversity of the work realised in the 2007-2013 period into the following four thematic axes and 16 sub-themes:

Territorial growth
- Space management and spatial planning
- Short supply chains
- Urban-rural relations
- LEADER and the French Rural Network
- Territorial cooperation

Smart growth
- Research and territories
- Local and innovative territorial development
- Entrepreneurs in the rural world

Growth and environment
- Biomass energy
- Biodiversity, agro-ecology and water
- Forest and wood
- Eco-construction

Inclusive growth
- Services to the population
- Host territories and attractiveness
- Territorial management of jobs and skills
- Young people and inter-generational approaches

References:

Recto Verso - the official seminar video captures the mood of the event [http://vimeo.com/80585403]

Webzine - presents the seminar results in a multimedia format [http://appstree.fr/actesRRFdijon/]

Europe 2020 [http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm]
Local Action Groups (LAGs) are local public-private partnerships that work to promote LEADER’s ‘bottom-up’ approach to rural development. Here we feature some recent LAG projects.

On Saturday, 25 January 2014 around 100 rural actors met in Wincrange, Luxembourg to discuss plans for a newly-formed LAG area that includes LAG Clervaux-Vianden with part of the former LAG Wiltz-Rédange, encompassing the town of Bourscheid and two natural parks. The event allowed representatives from communities across the new area to meet and work together on the new LEADER programme 2014-2020.

“We are delighted with the high level of participation from people active in our new LEADER group for the Eisleck region. This meeting is the first step in the preparatory work that we have to complete for the new LEADER programme – identifying priorities and developing project ideas to deliver our aims. We are well positioned now to move forward,” reports Joelle Lutgen-Ferber, Manager of LAG Clervaux-Vianden.

After an introduction from Marcel Thommes, President of LAG Clervaux-Vianden, the participants were presented with the historical achievements of LEADER through illustrative projects before being introduced to the requirements of the new programme. The delegates were then divided into working groups on tourism, environment and climate, children and youth, social inclusion and the fight against poverty and communication. For more information: www.cv.leader.lu
France: **Popular Transnational Cooperation project seeks to climb every mountain**

Sancy Europe Montagnes, based in the Massif Central region of France, has issued a call for new partners for its Transnational Cooperation project linking farmers from the region with agricultural and tourism interests in other mountain areas across Europe. Richly symbolic, the project sends hikers to scale the highest peaks in each EU Member State as a pretext for studying the evolution and diversification of agriculture in Europe’s mountainous areas.

Active since 2007, this 10-year project has taken six groups of French farmers on expeditions to 15 different European countries, hosted by LAGs from Finland to Cyprus. The 2014 trip will see a LAG partner from the Auvergne region visit Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria and LAG partners are now being sought for the 2015-2017 expeditions.

The popular project has brought many different groups of farmers together with a broad range of actors across Europe, resulting in the spread of innovation and opportunities for income diversification. In 2013, the exchange resulted in the production of a 52-minute documentary which has been shown across the Auvergne region and has also been used by the LAG partners in Finland and Sweden. More information about the project, including videos and radio presentations are available from [www.europe27.eu](http://www.europe27.eu)

Italy: **New technologies help traditional wine producers improve quality**

On 30 January 2014 an information day was held for wine producers in the Lazio region of Italy to present the work of the ECOVINO Project, co-financed by LAG Castelli Romani e Monti Prenestini. This project has developed a system of sharing climate information with wine growers across the region to ensure that they have the best information on which to base vineyard management decisions. Using new technologies growers can receive up-to-date weather forecast data along with information relating to micro-climates and pests and diseases of specific relevance to grape growing, via emails and SMS. By using this system wine growers should be able to achieve better crop yields, decrease the need for pesticides and improve the quality of the final product.

Those attending the workshop heard presentations from the different partners in the ECOVINO initiative, including the University of Tuscia (on phenological aspects), IBIMET (on weather forecasting, spatial and computer platforms on which the system is based) and METEOTEC (on the mathematical models and scientific coordination). Further information is available from: [www.galcastelli.it](http://www.galcastelli.it)
UK - England: **Open-minded consultation on Local Development Strategy**

The Chalk and Cheese LAG based in Dorset, England has consulted widely in seeking to engage with local individuals, groups and businesses whilst developing its Local Development Strategy throughout March 2014. The LAG embraces everyone within the community and has a total of 250 members, about 40 of whom are regular attendees at meetings to assess projects. Looking to cast its net widely, the LAG has been using social networking, including Twitter, to encourage participation and ideas to help grow the local rural economy in West Dorset.

Four public meetings were held in March, which were attended by around 100 individuals representing a variety of rural businesses and community organisations. Each meeting explored what works in achieving economic growth and what needs to be improved, as well as suggesting and prioritising project and development ideas.

Sarah Harbige, programme manager for the LAG notes that, “the feedback from the meetings has been added to the results of the online consultation which we also used to explore the operation of the LAG which is open to anyone who is interested in rural development of our area.” Further information is available from: [www.chalkandcheese.org](http://www.chalkandcheese.org)

Austria: **Conference explores synergy between LEADER and biodiversity**

On 3 April 2014 delegates from across Europe attended the ‘Biodiversity and LEADER’ conference within the framework of a campaign being organised by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management. The 120 participants who represented LAGs, local authorities, government departments and NGOs came together in Vienna to examine good practice in LEADER delivery of biodiversity outcomes.

The conference was split into a number of sessions. The first involved presentations from four international speakers setting out how support for biodiversity can be provided within rural development planning. The benefits of this approach were demonstrated by Bérengère Bougué from LAG Pays de Sources & Vallées in France who spoke about incorporating biodiversity into a Local Development Strategy. A poster session featuring 14 successful environmental projects, from nine different countries, provided a great opportunity for sharing good practice. These projects included the wolf, wildlife and farmers initiative from LAG ADRI Vallodolid Norte in Spain, a network of local nature conservation areas from LAG Nordburgenland in Austria, a bees and biodiversity project from Naturpark Dübener Heide in Germany and a sustainable orchards story from LAG Posavje in Slovakia.

The event marked the culmination of a series of actions, research and seminars that recognise the value of biodiversity and cultural landscapes and that sought to embed adequate support for biodiversity-related activity into future funding programmes. Further information is available from: [www.umweltdachverband.at/service/veranstaltungsnachlese/biodiversitaet-leader](http://www.umweltdachverband.at/service/veranstaltungsnachlese/biodiversitaet-leader)
Estonia: LEADER groups take part in International Green Week

International Green Week in Berlin, which ran from 17-26 January 2014, is the world’s biggest consumer fair for the food, agricultural and horticultural industries. This year Estonia was the main partner country for the event and several LAGs and local food networks from the country were showcased.

Featured on the ‘Natural Estonia’ stand, LAG Hiiumaa Cooperation Network promoted their region through a series of postcards which were developed in cooperation with the Estonian NSU as a communication tool. These showcased their ‘Growing Gastronauts’ transnational project which was a recent winner of the Best Local Resources and Environment Project in 2013’s Nordic-Baltic Leader Cooperation Awards. The project improves links between local food producers and schools, creating trust in local products and improving children’s knowledge of healthy eating.

Reet Kokovkin, coordinator for LAG Hiiumaa Cooperation Network enjoyed the experience, “this is my first time at International Green Week and it is a very powerful tool for speaking to people. The key word here is food, food and once more food!” For more information: www.kogu.hiiumaa.ee
A highly successful Transnational Cooperation project involving 14 LAGs from seven Member States and led by LAG Zuid Twente from the Netherlands recently announced two follow-up activities for 2014. The cooperation project focused on the development of short supply chains for local food across Europe and facilitated a number of highly successful international food markets between 2010 and the end of 2013. The final event in November 2013 was held in Sinnamary in French Guiana, which combined a study tour of local farms and food producers along with workshops on traditional and organic agriculture. The visit culminated in a European market featuring Dutch beer, French cheese and tropical fruits from French Guiana!

Antje Grolleman, local food project coordinator from LAG Zuid Twente said, “the project included a lot of great experiences, delicious food and the promise we’ll stay in contact.” The two extra activities are: 1) a local food market to be held in Brussels on 9 October 2014 involving all partners; and 2) the development of an online local food market (www.moreforlocal.eu). Videos of the exchange visits made by one of the partners (LAG Pays Dignois) can be viewed at: http://www.leaderenpaysdignois.fr/index.php/videos
Finland: New LEADER branding rolled out to LAGs

As from February 2014, a new rebranded LEADER approach is being rolled out to all Finnish LAGs. The preparatory work helped to identify LEADER’s main target groups and the key messages for each of these groups. The materials supporting the new LEADER brand will be available from the image bank of the Finnish NRN’s website (www.maaseutu.fi), which will retain its status as the central communications channel for the Rural Development Programme.

Marjut Haapanen, Communications Officer, LAG Satakunta Region, who has been closely involved in the branding process, is excited about the change, “in February, we started the launch effort process, which ensures that the brand content is rolled out throughout Finland in an efficient and commensurate way. With this in mind, the regions will be assisted in implementing the branding through a training package produced by an advertising agency.”

Later this spring, the new www.leadersuomi.fi (Leader Finland) website will go live and will serve as the forum for marketing of LEADER work. The new branding work will be communicated widely during a series of LEADER events across Finland between 9-15 June 2014. During this week local LAGs will hold ‘open houses’ at LEADER-funded sites in their regions. As Network Coordinator Juha-Matti Markkola from the Rural Network Unit of Finland explains, the events, “form part of the general publicising of the outcomes of LEADER activities and of the launch of the new brand.”

UK - Scotland: Conference launches LEADER for 2014-2020

On 20 March 2014, over 150 delegates from across rural and coastal Scotland came together with representatives from other European countries to kick start action on the implementation of the LEADER approach in Scotland for 2014-2020. Organised by the Scottish National Rural Network and the Scottish Government, participants were inspired by several European speakers. Edina Ocsko from ENRD highlighted the different approaches to the delivery of LEADER across Europe whilst Kirsten Birke Lund (Vice-President of ELARD) shared her personal experiences from the Jammerbugt-Vesthimmerland LAG in Denmark.

“I am delighted that such a wide range of representatives were able to come together to inspire each other with their ideas and experiences. We heard about a number of different approaches to Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) and my hope is that the day infused fresh ideas about how CLLD might be implemented in their area,” said Alistair Prior, Head of the Scottish Government’s Rural Communities and Rural Policy Team.

Four workshop sessions saw participants exchange ideas and practices, informed by presentations on the ‘youth co-ordinator model’ from Sweden, community engagement activities from Wales, working relationships between Managing Authorities and LAGs from England and the integration of LAGs and FLAGs from Bornholm in Denmark. Further information and a video of the event are available from: http://www.ruralgateway.org.uk/en/node/8683

John Hutchison, Chair of Scottish Rural Action who are to organise the first Scottish Rural Parliament in November 2014, poses a question during the plenary session.
EU rural development incorporates a diverse range of activity - from forestry to rural finance to emerging challenges such as climate change. In this edition, we examine how the network is communicating to the general public.

Getting the message across

Article 54 of the new Rural Development Regulation (1305/2013) states that National Rural Network (NRN) communications plans must include information and communication activities aimed at a broader public. Some are already embracing this opportunity to tell the story of rural development.

For some, the 2014-2020 programming period requirement to appeal to a broader public represents a venture into unknown territory. For all, it demands careful consideration of how to deploy limited resources to best fulfil this obligation. Fortunately, the network offers some inspiration as to the form such engagement can take.

Taking care of our roots

Some tips on communicating rural issues to broader audiences can be found in the European Commission high profile ‘taking care of our roots’ campaign. The aim is to tell people, in particular urban dwellers under 40, who may be disconnected from agriculture life, about the merits of the Common Agricultural Policy and explain its reform. The communication messages that the public sees only represent the tip of the iceberg – hidden from public view is a year’s work in preparing the Europe-wide campaign.

The starting point was research to better understand the target audience. Commission agriculture spokesman Roger Waite says that focus groups were created to provide qualitative input in order to, “help us fine-tune our messages, communication tools and campaign slogans.” Professional communication agencies were brought in to conduct the focus groups.

The research fed into posters, banners and other material, and advertisements for online broadcast, and for TV and cinema spots. The campaign highlights how agriculture connects to the daily life of citizens. The campaign runs until September 2015, when results will be evaluated. The assessment will be done by a specialised contractor, and by measuring changes in public perceptions of agriculture via Eurobarometer surveys.

Make the most of what you have

Communications campaigns come in all shapes and sizes. When planning outreach, rural development communications practitioners are likely to be working with limited budgets. But this shouldn’t stop one from thinking big. The ‘Living Land’ campaign, run in 2011 by MINHA TERRA (a Portuguese network of Local Development Associations) had just €38 000 to spend, but was able to maximise its impact by partnering with Portugal’s TSF radio...
to organise a nationwide campaign, producing 30 two-minute radio spots that highlighted in an appealing journalistic style, the work of a variety of LEADER projects.

To make the most of a small budget, MINHA TERRA coordinator Luís Chaves says NRNs must, “keep it simple: give a voice to local project promoters and try to engage a relevant media partner.” The Living Land campaign worked because it was focused and produced interesting content that was relevant to the public. “We were contacted by some of projects presented in the radio broadcast. They have seen an increased demand from the public for their products,” he adds.

While it is not always easy to measure the results of rural development communication campaigns, Luís Chaves recommends that NRNs take long-term perspectives. Communication is sowing, “seeds for a possible change in the future,” he says, and public awareness about rural development can evolve in the same way as public knowledge of other topics, such as environmental issues.

**Speak the right language**

A key factor in successfully engaging with the broader public is to escape the straitjacket of programming jargon and instead use a language the public understands. This liberates new approaches and interesting ideas. Thomas Müller, a consultant and Local Action Group Manager in northern Austria, practices this approach and “thinks local” when engaging with the public. He is even planning a ‘LEADER for dummies’-type book.

He argues that there is a strong justification for such an approach, considering the overall amounts being spent on bottom-up rural development projects. The public has a right to know, but there is a dearth of straightforward information. He notes that more than 50% of Austrians are living in LEADER areas yet there is not a single book in which LEADER is explained in a simple way, “with funny stories, easy examples and motivating descriptions.”

**Emphasising excellence**

The Italian NRN’s ‘rural excellence’ campaign has just got underway. It highlights positive experiences from the 2007-2013 programming period. Like the ‘taking care of our roots’ campaign, it is based on thorough preparation.

Milena Verrascina of the Italian National Institute of Agricultural Economics says the first stage has been to assemble case studies, so the campaign can, “explain the most relevant cases from several points of view.” She adds that the, “programme explains experiences, life stories, business, territories and beneficiaries who, using public funds made available through RDPs, have improved their business and their territory.”

This information has first been made available online, with several interactive elements such as maps and videos. In May, a radio and news media campaign began. The campaign will help show the public that agriculture is more than an economic activity, “it is a strategic activity for social, environmental and territorial affairs,” says Milena Verrascina.

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**Three public outreach campaigns**


Promoting rural identity through storytelling

Transnational cooperation project connects rural youth to their communities.

Rural areas need to promote a positive image of the countryside in order to encourage young people to remain part of their local communities. “Our rural areas strongly depend on the youth,” explains Sofia Nikka from the Kolari municipality in Finland. Six Local Action Groups – from Italy, Finland and France – thus came together in this transnational project to encourage teenagers to reconnect with their regions through creativity.

Initially centred on traditional stories, popular social and audio-visual media were used to promote the project. An interactive learning platform was created to allow the exchange of ideas, stories and experience. Amongst the activities of this ongoing project, 12 short films were produced, exchange visits were organised and the Italian lead partner published a storytelling book about the local traditions and legends.

The project promotes social skills development, open-mindedness and the reinforcement of local cultural identity. It is also enabling the teenage participants to strengthen creative skills, such as movie-making, photography and story-writing.

The project benefited from an EAFRD contribution of €220 842, or 44% of the total investment. A final campus project is being held in Sardinia in May 2014, where the 12 films will be premiered.

Monitoring groundwater use in Malta

Farmers contribute to water conservation strategy.

Water scarcity is a real challenge in countries such as Malta. Over-exploitation of the island’s limited groundwater sources is having serious consequences on water quality due to saltwater intrusion. The EAFRD has contributed almost €1.5 million out of a total project cost of €2.22 million to a project to install water meters on private groundwater boreholes used for agricultural activities. The project allows groundwater consumption to be measured and it has also upgraded the infrastructure for treated agricultural sewerage effluent.

The project is raising awareness among farmers of the importance of monitoring and controlling groundwater abstraction, in order to improve the quantity and quality of Malta’s precious water resources. Over the long-term the country aims to reduce the need for energy-intensive techniques to produce potable water supplies, as part of its plan to decrease its carbon footprint.
Maintaining attractive landscapes in Greece

Support for traditional farming has contemporary benefits.

The Greek island of Lesvos is a mixture of forests and picturesque mountain ranges. Lesvos is becoming increasingly well-known as an attractive eco-tourism destination for bird-watchers and hikers as the island lies on migration routes for a range of sought-after species.

The EAFRD is supporting traditional farmers in Lesvos, such as Alexandros Giannis, a sheep farmer from the village of Agra whose family have long been in the farming business. He receives payments via the Rural Development Programme to compensate for the higher operational costs of his land that arise from natural handicaps such as steep slopes and thin soils. These handicaps make farming less competitive and difficult to sustain in Lesvos.

In 2013, Alexandros Giannis received €110 per hectare, around 76% of which comes from the EAFRD. With this support, families such as his are able to remain in the area and contribute to community life. In addition, by supporting longstanding agroforestry land-use systems, environmental habitats are being conserved. Traditional farming practices are attuned to local conditions and help to preserve soil and maintain the cultural landscapes, something that is greatly appreciated by locals and tourists alike.

Better rural healthcare and wellness services

German project increases medical capacity to develop the countryside.

The small town of Mirow, like other rural areas in eastern Germany, was finding it difficult to attract young doctors to the region. With the doctors in the existing group practice approaching retirement age, the situation was seen to be exacerbating the negative demographic development of the area.

A project was developed to greatly enhance local medical capacity and to expand the services offered to include acupuncture, sport-related and rehabilitation medicine. In all, €1,845,000 was invested - with €250,000 coming from EAFRD - to acquire land, construct consultation rooms and upgrade equipment.

The project was a great challenge for all participants but it has developed new networks in local health care and tourism sectors. The new practice created three new jobs, including two new doctors. Thanks to the expansion operating costs have decreased, new equipment is acquired faster and overall quality has improved.

Involving ordinary families in sustainable development

To optimise water and energy household consumption.

The Association of Companion Builders provides assistance to rural families in France. Their work consists of helping households under budgetary strain to measure and better manage their energy and water consumption, so as to lower their utilities bills.

Four ambassador families in three municipalities were mobilised and equipment for measuring and limiting consumption was installed in 24 volunteer households (saving €100 per year in electricity and 50m³ of water). The association built a strong partnership with local actors involved in sustainable development and energy saving and it organised a two-day workshop for families and volunteers to learn about ‘green’ actions that can be applied in everyday life.

From a total of just under €20,000, the EAFRD financed over 50% of the budget. The project strengthened the social ties between the families involved and the initiative encouraged similar initiatives in other parts of the region.
“Farmers get specific training, especially for identifying plant and animal species in their meadows.”
Daniel Bogner, Austrian agri-environment expert

"...measures devoted to marketing and quality of agricultural products are of special relevance for the diversification of farms in mountain areas.”
Juan Andrés Gutiérrez Lazpita, Department of Agriculture of the Basque Country, Euromontana President

“Biodiversity monitoring taught me to see my fields and meadows in a different, more ecological way.”
Sandra Lerner, Rosenhof Farm and Rural Development Programme beneficiary

In Your Own Words
We pass the microphone over to hear what you have to say about environmental services and support for EU mountain areas...

Mountainous areas account for around 15% of the EU’s total agricultural land and 18% of the agricultural labour force...

“Depopulation remains a very real threat. Rural development policy can make mountainous areas more attractive to inward investment...[and]...as places to live and work, including for young people.”
Alexia Rouby, Director, Euromontana

Rural Development Programmes finance a wide range of projects in rural areas that provide EU citizens with vital environmental services...

“...all projects can deliver environment and climate-friendly benefits if they are designed and funded to do so.”
Kaley Hart, ENRD Environmental Services Focus Group Member

The above quotes are taken from the ‘Delivering Environmental Services’ and the ‘Rural development support for EU mountain areas’ videos, both of which are available from the ENRD media gallery: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/publications-and-media/media-gallery
Doing it right

Catch up on all the points made at the ENRD Seminar on Successful Implementation of RDPs, including videos of the presentations: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/en-rd-events-and-meetings/seminars-and-conferences/successful-implementation-of-rdps

Out & About

Smile, you’re on camera! We select some of our favourite photos from the recent networking activities of the European rural development community.

How do you like yours?


Lights, camera, action!

Hannes Schmidt and Jasmin Philipp, representing the students of the Saengerstadt Gymnasium Finsterwalde in Germany, were the winners of the ENRD Rural Youth Video Competition. Check out their video, entitled The Eternal Cycle: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/en-rd-events-and-meetings/fairs-and-shows/en/rural-youth-video-competition_en.cfm
I like to move it, move it!
Participants at the ENRD’s Youth and Young Farmers’ Workshop are encouraged to get active during the event. See page 6 for more information.

Networking in action
The ENRD Contact Point regularly hosts visiting delegations interested in rural development, such as this group of LAG representatives and journalists from Romania, who were in Brussels in March 2014. http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/en-rd-events-and-meetings/visits-to-enrd-contact-point

Harmonisation...
Rural development communications practitioners flex their vocal chords at the ENRD Seminar on Communicating Rural Development. See page 2 for more information.
Are organic products of the same quality as other food and drink?

Organic produce has to meet the same safety standards as other foods and complies with EU General Food law. However, instead of using chemical compounds to combat pests or weeds, organic farmers use multi-annual crop rotations and resistant varieties to prevent such problems. And rather than using artificial preservatives and flavour enhancers, organic processors keep products as fresh as possible by focusing on seasonality and local markets.

Do organic products cost more than other food and drink?

Organic products often take longer to produce, sometimes need more work, and have to be separated from conventional products. They are processed and distributed on a smaller scale, and are subject to specific controls and certifications. These extra production costs often have to be passed on to consumers for organic operations to be financially viable.

Is organic farming less productive than conventional farming and does it take up more land?

There is no consensus on whether organic farming produces lower yields than other types of agriculture. Both sides of the debate have been argued by several studies.

*Source: European Commission - Organic farming*

The European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) is the hub that connects rural development stakeholders throughout the European Union (EU). The ENRD contributes to the effective implementation of Member States’ Rural Development Programmes by generating and sharing knowledge, as well as through facilitating information exchange and cooperation across rural Europe.

For all the latest videos from the network...