



Awareness raising was identified as a priority topic since the beginning of the Thematic Group (TG) on 'Mainstreaming the Bioeconomy', and its importance has been highlighted throughout the TG's work. Thus, the TG's [third meeting](#) focused on awareness raising and knowledge transfer experiences that increase rural stakeholders' awareness of bioeconomy.

Awareness raising can create a shared understanding of bioeconomy – and the opportunities it offers – among rural actors. Approaches vary and can be supported through Rural Development Programmes (RDPs), most effectively in synergy with other EU funding programmes and national funds. The aim should be to reach out to all rural stakeholders, create a feeling of ownership and ensure that bioeconomy strategies are tailored to local specificities and resources and answer precise needs.

The meeting was also an opportunity to discuss the draft recommendations produced by the Thematic Group on using the RDPs to promote rural bioeconomy.

Event Information

Title: 3rd Meeting of the Thematic Group on 'Mainstreaming the Bioeconomy'

Date: 15 May 2019

Location: Brussels

Organiser: ENRD Contact Point

Participants: 38, including farmers, advisory services, Managing Authorities, National Rural Networks, European organisations and EU institutions

Outcomes: Examples of, and suggestions for, awareness raising and knowledge transfer approaches on bioeconomy targeting different rural stakeholders; suggestions on the use of RDPs to support rural bioeconomy

Website: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/3rd-enrd-thematic-group-meeting-mainstreaming-bioeconomy_en

AWARENESS RAISING APPROACHES FOR RURAL BIOECONOMY

Catherine Bowyer (ENRD CP) [presented](#) the results of the ENRD analytical work on awareness raising. Interviews with rural stakeholders in six EU Member States (MS) [highlighted](#) the need to clarify the concept of the bioeconomy, its relevance for specific local/regional contexts and the ways it can be put into practice to deliver economic, environmental and social benefits to rural communities. Both communications and networking play a crucial role.

Stakeholder engagement experiences across the EU

The experiences of projects that focus on, or give a prominent role to, awareness raising remarked the need and importance of engaging both practitioners and policy makers.

In Finland, the advisory service ProAgria Oulu used LEADER support to organise an [awareness-raising tour](#) of the region which eventually boosted bioeconomy-related businesses in the area. In Italy, the EIP-AGRI Operational Group [SmartGas](#) is testing and promoting technological and agronomic solutions to consolidate the agricultural biogas sector, involving different rural stakeholders (see details on both projects on next page).

[BIOEAST](#) is actively promoting the bioeconomy among policy-makers in 11 central-eastern European countries through information, evidence-based data and tools. The initiative, started in 2015, is fostering synergies and cooperation among bioeconomy actors at regional, national and EU level and has put the bioeconomy on the political agenda. BIOEAST is participating in two Horizon2020 projects and other EU initiatives on bioeconomy, which is providing a perspective on the future CAP Strategic Plans to Member States.



Advising and engaging rural SMEs

Heini Iinatti, ProAgria Oulu (FI)

The [Oulu Region Bioeconomy Leader Tour](#) consisted of a series of communication actions to build awareness and engagement on bioeconomy among rural actors, particularly SMEs and local municipalities. Through 117 information events, dissemination of good examples and field visits, the initiative reached over 2 000 contacts. The project leader [ProAgria](#), a rural expert organisation, used complementary RDP funding to provide tailor-made business advice to local SMEs interested in creating bioeconomy businesses.

The project was very successful: 55 rural SMEs have developed bioeconomy businesses, 10-17 initiatives applied for funding and five-ten new enterprises were created. Tailoring the activities to the area's specificities was a key success factor.



Involving farmers in biogas production

Giulio Borgia, SmartGas project (IT)

The EIP-AGRI Operational Group [SmartGas](#) is involving six farmers, the [Tuscan farmer association](#), researchers and the national biogas consortium in testing and promoting increased greenhouse gas mitigation in agriculture through better agronomic solutions in the biogas process.

In presenting the project Giulio Borgia – a dairy farmer himself – detailed the multiple benefits offered to farmers by transitioning to bioeconomy, including better handling of slurry/manure, less smell, less use of chemical fertilizers, income diversification and support to generational renewal. He stressed that biogas production, initially feared as potentially competing with food production, eventually proved to be an incentive to sustainable and organic agriculture.



DISCUSSION POINTS, CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

The meeting included two rounds of parallel working groups, one to discuss experiences with raising awareness on bioeconomy (starting with short project [presentations](#)) and one commenting on the TG's draft policy recommendations on the use of RDPs to support rural bioeconomy value chains circulated to the participants. The discussions highlighted several key points, all elaborating on the importance of reaching out to rural actors by combining bottom-up approaches with strategies and political frameworks that are conducive to the bioeconomy.

Farmers and rural SMEs should feel ownership of bioeconomy projects and be able to share their experiences with others through peer-to-peer exchanges, complementing the collection and sharing of good practices. **Advisory services** can support the development of soft and hard (technical) skills of farmers and SMEs. **Local authorities** should be aware of their role not only as funders but as key actors enabling change. The EU-wide [Covenant of Mayors](#) could be a tool to bridge the gap between the local and EU level. Furthermore, linking various initiatives increases the added value of the results creating a bioeconomy 'value-web' (rather than value-chain).

Funding is crucial and synergies between RDPs and other funding opportunities should be enhanced; multi-fund approaches are important and should be further exploited. Packages of RDP measures could be offered to support rural actors' integration in new bioeconomy value chains. This should feed into the future national CAP Strategic Plans. However, since **developing and strengthening the bioeconomy is not a linear process**, support - innovation, funding, technical and business guidance, monitoring – is necessary at all stages of development of the value chain, not just in the set-up.

National **bioeconomy strategies** can enable coherence between sectors, policies and legislation. They must build on local and regional dynamics, strengths and needs, answering peoples' and communities' practical needs and seeking an emotional connection with rural communities.

Finally, the **sustainability of bioeconomy is not automatic** and relevant strategies should aim for – and monitor – ecosystem preservation and the respect of natural resources.

All these elements will feed into the final policy recommendations to be presented at the ENRD [Bioeconomy Seminar](#) on 3 July 2019.



ENRD resources and tools

Rural Bioeconomy Portal

Policy documents, relevant stakeholders and inspiring project examples (not only EAFRD-funded) – in six languages!

https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/greening-rural-economy/bioeconomy/rural-bioeconomy-portal_en

ENRD Publications

EU Rural Review 23 '[Green Economy - Opportunities for Rural Europe](#)'

EU Rural Review 25 '[Resource efficiency](#)'

EAFRD Projects Brochure '[Resource-Efficient Rural Economies](#)'