

The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development

Examples of project support for young farmers and younger people in rural Europe



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The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development

Information exchange is an important aspect of the NRN and ENRD operations. This brochure forms part of a series of ENRD publications that has been introduced to help encourage such information exchange.

Each edition of the brochure features different types of projects that have received RDP co-finance from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD).

This edition of the brochure highlights projects examples that have helped to provide development opportunities for young farmers and younger people in rural Europe.

Further editions in the series of this EAFRD Project Examples brochure can be downloaded from the *ENRD website's library section*¹, and a *RDP Projects database*² contains many additional examples of EAFRD assistance to rural development initiatives.

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1 http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/en-rd-library/eafrd_examples_of_projects_brochure_en/en/eafrd_examples_of_projects_brochure_en_home.cfm

2 <http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/projects/>

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Supporting young farmers and younger people in rural Europe

Rural areas need young people. Without young people our countryside would be at serious risk because young people are vital for sustaining rural life. They represent a reservoir of potential rural entrepreneurs as well as the next generation of farmers and foresters who produce our food and look after the land so that it can continue to provide us with important environmental services such as clean water, biodiversity habitats, and renewable energy among other things.

What's more, the viability of essential rural services like schools, libraries, shops, healthcare and public transport can all be threatened in areas which lack young people to make use of them. Young families are also crucial for maintaining the long-term fabric of rural communities.

Mixed and stable age balances within our rural populations hence offer the most constructive grounds for sustainable growth throughout Europe as a whole.

EU rural development policy recognises and promotes the importance of supporting young farmers and younger people in rural areas through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). The scope of assistance that is available

from the EAFRD for younger people covers a broad array of different economic, environmental and social projects in each of the 27 Member States.

This brochure has been produced to showcase an interesting sample of these types of EAFRD projects. Articles in the brochure feature some of the success stories which have resulted through EAFRD project support for younger³ people engaged in activities ranging from agri-food businesses to rural tourism.

Other articles highlight the important integration roles that EAFRD investments can play for local youth facilities and rural culture in helping to counter the migration pressures offered by urban life.

All of the projects in the brochure can be replicated elsewhere to help improve rural Europe's attractiveness for younger people as a place where they choose to live, work and visit.

Similar uses of the EAFRD's resources for supporting younger people can thus make a significant difference in ensuring a long-lasting future of successful, thriving, modern, and sustainable rural areas.

3 The brochure adopts a definition of 'younger people' as up to the age of 40 years old. This reflects the EAFRD regulatory rules concerning the definition of young farmers.

Young farmer investments: funding the next generation of Cypriot agri-businesses

Evidence from a rural development project in Cyprus demonstrates the EAFRD's potential for generating multiple benefits through coordinating packages of targeted funding support to young and entrepreneurial farmers.

Young farmers represent the future of our food supplies and they also play key roles in safeguarding the other benefits that a healthy countryside provides. However, Europe's young farmers are declining in numbers and this can threaten the long-term sustainability of rural areas.

Financial assistance for young farmers is available through the Member States' Rural Development Programme (RDP) measures to help redress this issue. RDPs contain funding support to help younger people to offset some of the costs involved in setting up an agricultural business. A dedicated RDP measure titled 'setting up of young farmers' concerns young farmers under 40 years of age who are involved in establishing a business for the first time on an agricultural holding, as head of the holding.

Other valuable assistance from the EAFRD for young farmers can be found under different RDP measures such as farm modernisation to cover expensive outlays associated with, buildings, and equipment. EAFRD support for young farmers can also be used to improve agri-business skills, encourage diversified enterprises and enhance environmentally-friendly operations.

Talking about EAFRD support packages to young farmers, Dacian Cioloş, Member of the European Commission responsible for Agriculture and Rural Development said, "More than two thirds of European farmers are over 55 years of age. We have to therefore ask ourselves who is going to live in the countryside

and who is going to guarantee the future of European agriculture? What we need to do by means of the future Common Agricultural Policy is to help the young to establish themselves in rural areas and to encourage them to invest in agriculture. For this reason, and on top of the measures that already exist in investments support, we suggest stronger support for young farmers during the first five years of them starting their business."

Specialised *sub-programmes within RDPs for young farmers*⁴ have also recently been proposed by Commissioner Cioloş to help target EAFRD towards promising young farmers during their start-up period.

Investment support

An example of the benefits that are produced where EAFRD measures assist Europe's young farmers during their early years can be seen in Cyprus, where Vassilis Kyprianou received funding from several RDP measures for his new agri-business.

Mr Kyprianou is a young farmer from the village of Kampia in central Cyprus. He has a strong agronomy and veterinary background and he had wanted to invest in his future by starting up an agri-food enterprise. "For a long time I had dreamed of having my own farm business", says Mr Kyprianou who goes on, "I always wanted to rear my own livestock and as a keen environmentalist I was also interested in producing organic vegetables."



© Vassilis Kyprianou

EAFRD support from the Cypriot RDP helped Mr Kyprianou turn his dream into reality using financial assistance from a combination of RDP measures. Start-up funding (€40 000) was provided through the dedicated measure for young farmers ('setting up of young farmers') and this was accompanied by a significant sum of support (€500 000) from the RDP measure assisting investments in farm holdings. "With the help of the RDP I was able to launch my business. The RDP money helped me to cover the high costs involved with setting up this type of business."

"My objective was to have a mixed farm with a diversified product range that would be distinguished for its high standards in all respects of food quality, animal welfare, working conditions and environmental impact. Investments in equipment and facilities to achieve these aims are not cheap. My business plan included the installation of modern technology and equipment for animal breeding, milking and production of milk products, as well as the construction of a high-tech greenhouse for the organic production of vegetables."

"A top priority for me was the use of the most up to date technology. I felt this was the best way to guarantee quality in a cost-effective manner. I was able to use the EAFRD support to help me purchase a microchip system for registering my animals and I also bought automated milking machines. In addition I used the RDP funding for ultrasound equipment which I need for detecting pregnancies in the livestock, and I built a silo for animal feed storage which includes automated machinery for transporting animal feed and an electricity generator."

"For the greenhouse, the EAFRD helped me offset the investments costs involved in constructing the unit as well as an automated irrigation system, a thermal curtain and a meteorological station. These allow me to properly calculate and control environmental factors such as energy use and water consumption."

Careful targeting of EAFRD support packages towards young entrepreneurial farmers can provide EU citizens with a range of positive outcomes.

Multiplier effects

Two new full-time jobs have been created by this project and Mr Kyprianou is very happy with the results of his business plan. "My products are all sold under my 'Riverland Bio Farm' brand name and I have customers throughout all of Cyprus. I have also branched out into the export trade and I have found markets for my dairy produce in Thessaloniki in Greece."

These positive economic development outcomes from the EAFRD project are complemented by beneficial social outcomes because the young farmer also makes his business available for use as a 'Green Care'⁵ centre. "My farm offers work therapy to drug users who are in process of rehabilitation. They help with the distribution of the farm products in the local market. Their involvement in the farm helps them get back into society" explains Mr Kyprianou.

This type of EAFRD investment in a young farmer's business hence produces valuable multiplier effects. Environmental efficiency, job creation and social inclusion have all been achieved by Mr Kyprianou. Such an approach fits well with the recommendations emerging from a recent EU level evaluation of CAP support for young farmers which noted both the importance of targeting CAP support at competent young farmers and the benefits of combining packages of EAFRD support for these young farmers via a mix of RDP measures.

“ My objective was to have a mixed farm with a diversified product range that would be distinguished for its high standards. ”

Vassilis Kyprianou



5 http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/themes/social-aspects/social-farming/en/social-farming_en.cfm

Youth centre services: multifunctional community facility proves popular with Dutch young people

EAFRD assistance for projects providing rural youth support services can play beneficial roles in protecting the long-term viability of communities in our countryside.

Reversing youth migration trends in rural Europe remains a formidable challenge. The factors which push young people out of rural areas and pull young people into urban zones are well known. These rural depopulation factors are succinctly summarised in a 2010 report by the European Parliament titled *How to promote the role of youth in rural areas of Europe?*⁶ The report draws attention to the EAFRD's potential for addressing youth depopulation in the countryside and concludes that concerted efforts are needed on many other fronts to properly tackle the exodus of young people from rural Europe.

One part of this complex challenge involves providing more equal opportunities for rural young people to access the type of entertainment and recreational services that interest them. An EAFRD project from the Netherlands is involved in this type of rural development activity, having created a new and trendy multifunctional youth centre.

Pieter Brands is the project coordinator for this 'Rock Foundation' project which was developed for young people from the coastal area around the town of Urk, in the country's Flevoland Province. He describes how the rural youth initiative got started. "Our area is home to a large population of young people and approximately half of our 19 000 residents are younger than 20. This situation is rather unique in the Netherlands yet despite our large number of young inhabitants we were lacking appropriate facilities for them."

"Two local youth groups in particular wanted to find a good home for their services. One group was for young people aged

from 12 to 16 years and the other group focused on older teenagers aged 16 or above. Both groups came together to form the Rock Foundation which became the management body proposing to build a new and modern multipurpose youth centre."

Youth involvement

Costing nearly €1 million in total, the Rock Foundation's project received a grant from the national Rural Development Programme (RDP) which covered a beneficial 60% of the overall expenses. This money was used to construct and equip the new centre to a high standard which included a suite of modern facilities selected by the young people themselves.

Involving young people in the design of rural youth support schemes increases the relevance of their results and represents good practice for rural development projects. Mr Brands underlines how the Rock Foundation's youth-centred approach followed these principles. "Young people were involved in the planning of the building as well as during decision-making processes about its contents and design. Management positions in the Foundation such as President, Secretary and other committee members are held by young people. We also have a strong group of youth volunteers. Our approach is very democratic which can be time consuming but is good since it helps the young people to feel that this project is theirs so they take on ownership and care for it."

Youth involvement is sustained by a 'succession planning' technique which ensures that a new generation of young people is



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prepared to take over the management committee positions as the older teenagers out-grow the project. "This approach is absolutely necessary to keep the project young and fresh", observes Mr Brands, who adds, "Also, the use of permanent paid staff remains an important precondition to provide continuity where it is needed."

Other tips picked up by the project team that can be useful for communities interested in developing a similar rural project are pointed out by Mr Brands. "My advice is to pay attention to how the building will look since it is important to have an attractive interior and atmosphere which reflects young peoples' styles and interests. We found it was very useful to schedule enough time to get this part of the design process correct."

"Another thing we learnt is the power of public relations. We gained support for the project by keeping people informed through the media. We sent out press releases during different development stages of the project and we invested a lot of time in explaining to young people what was happening with their project idea as it unfolded into a real life building. Communicating with your audience is very useful and it helped us to bring in new volunteers who were involved with aspects of the project like fundraising and painting the building."

Multifunctional facilities

Since its opening in February 2011, the EAFRD project has been used by an average of 500 young people each week, and this number increases during holiday periods. "The centre has been specially designed to be a multipurpose facility which can offer different things at different times to different interest groups. For instance, young people can and do make good use of the centre for music purposes. We have bands rehearsing here and music lessons also happen in the centre."

"Fun is of course a central objective for everyone involved in the project so we provide many types of entertainments like billiard tables, table tennis and computer games. We have fun themed events such as Lego sessions or sixties music, all based on young peoples' ideas. We also organise holiday excursions and incorporate informal education elements through information

Succession planning methods can help rural youth initiatives to sustain their beneficial service functions.

about school activities and the hosting of exhibitions. One of our big goals is to help tackle delinquency issues linked to under-age drinking or drug misuse by offering an interesting and attractive place where young people can socialise safely", states Mr Brands.

He believes that the EAFRD project has had a positive effect on the young people of Urk and he considers that it is an advantageous tool for countering depopulation pressures. "We find that most young people in the area want to stay here and the RDP project's facilities play a role in this. It is quite possible that the youth centre will be used later on by the children of the young people who use it now."

“ *Young people were involved in the planning of the building as well as during decision making processes about its contents and design.* ”

Pieter Brands, The Rock Foundation



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Organic growth: EAFRD adds value to young business woman's apple juice products in Estonia

Tackling problems related to rural depopulation remains a challenge for Member States and the availability of EAFRD support for small rural businesses run by young people can help provide sufficient incentives to help redress out-migration trends.

Findings from an *EU-funded research study*⁷ about problems linked to population changes in rural Europe suggests that younger and well educated women are becoming the age group that is most likely to leave peripheral regions. This gender imbalance can exacerbate existing concerns about age imbalances and '*brain-drains*'⁸ in rural communities because a countryside containing mainly elderly or male citizens is disadvantaged in terms of its future viability.

Preserving balanced communities which contain similar numbers of both genders and all ages therefore remains one of the under-laying goals for rural development operations in the Member States.

EAFRD assistance through the Rural Development Programmes (RDPS) is able to help provide new opportunities for young women (as well as men) and this type of funding support can counter the push-factors which lead to depopulation. A good example of how this happens in practice can be found in rural Estonia where EAFRD has helped a young business woman to develop her own organic fruit enterprise.

Organic operations

Triinu Schneider is 35 years old and she lives in a small village on the island of Hiiumaa. Mrs Schneider understands the pressures

on younger people to leave remote and peripheral areas such as island communities observing that, "Many young people in Estonia migrate abroad because the wages and standard of living are higher there. I think it is good if opportunities exist to help younger people to start up their own company because this gives them a future to work towards. I had to work hard to get funding support for my business idea but it was worth it and I now feel that I have a good business which provides a useful service for me and other people from Hiiumaa as well as the rest of Estonia."

Mrs Schneider received support from the EAFRD to part-fund the costs of new pasteurising equipment which allowed her to expand her fruit pressing business. Describing the background to her project she explains, "In our local area we have over 50 hectares of apple gardens and I have a fruit press as well as a shredder which I use to produce my own apple juice from these orchards. I also hire my equipment out as a commercial service to local fruit growers here."

"My juice extractor is popular since many growers do not own a fruit press, or if they do, they lack the time to use it, because it is a very time consuming activity. My fruit press takes about 20 minutes to produce 100 litres of juice from apples and this makes it an attractive service."



© Tim Hudson

7 http://www.espon.eu/main/Menu_Projects/Menu_TargetedAnalyses/semigra.html

8 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brain_drain

"I wanted to increase the quality of my fruit juice by introducing a better pasteurising process which would make it easier for me to produce juice with a longer shelf life. I spoke to my customers and they told me they would also like to use a modern pasteurising system too for the fruit that they processed with my equipment. I realised I could provide myself and my customers with a more complete service if I could find the right type of pasteurising equipment. After some research I found a suitable pasteurising system from a supplier in Austria."

"My experience with the funding application process for the equipment was a bit complicated at times but I persevered and with the help of advisors I was able to get enough co-finance from the Estonian Rural Development Programme to cover around 50% of the costs for my new equipment. This made a big difference to my business as the efficiency of my fruit processing operations has increased by as much as 500%", reports Mrs Schneider contently.

Marketable products

Investment support from the EAFRD for Mrs Schneider's rural business provided the means to expand her operations and secure new outlets for her produce. "Thanks to the pasteurising system I have a much more marketable product. Before, I based my business marketing on the natural and organic character of my fruit juices. I still emphasise this important selling point but now I can also market my products with a higher quality pasteurised standard which shops like because a more 'stable' product gives them more sales flexibility."

"At the moment I am selling my products in 66 different places, including through the Internet, and I am working on ways to increase my markets. I make the effort to attend trade fairs, both at home and abroad, and I was very pleased to receive a 'green quality' mark from the national authorities in recognition of my quality standards. This has been well received by my customers and clearly helps me with my marketing efforts."

"I learnt that it can be difficult trying to get retailers, especially bigger chain-stores, to stock your products when you are just a small company like me. I found that the best way of getting a 'foot in the door' of new sales channels was to use a personal approach which has helped me to develop good working relationships with my clients."

EAFRD is being used throughout the EU to improve the quality and competitiveness of local food products.



© Triinu Schneider

Further business development plans are also being considered by Mrs Schneider who sees possibilities in other apple beverages. "I am looking into the prospects of producing for example cider from my new equipment. This would involve more legal requirements than pure fruit juice pasteurisation but I believe I could make a good quality product if I am able to get a license. My business already provides seasonal jobs for up to 30 people during harvest time and I would hope that I could increase this in the future."

Such a success story in a small rural business shows the development potential that younger people hold in our countryside and, with assistance from the EAFRD, their efforts can lead to new opportunities that reduce depopulation pressures among other young people as well.

“ The efficiency of my fruit processing operations has increased by as much as 500%. ”

Triinu Schneider

Encouraging young enterprise: business development scheme targets youth entrepreneurs in rural Sweden

Mentoring, training and peer learning are all key ingredients in a successful EAFRD scheme assisting young Swedes from rural communities to enter self-employment.

Sweden has a strong track record in using EU rural development funds for supporting the integration of young people into rural society. This point is underlined by the fact that youth projects have their own category in the National Rural Network's (NRN) annual *Rural Gala Countryside Awards scheme*⁹, for best practice EAFRD actions. Last year's winner in the youth category was a project involved with helping young people to develop their own rural businesses.

Demand for this EAFRD project was identified by the youth division of the Swedish Farmers Federation in Jönköping County (LRF ungdom). "A lot of farmers born in the 1940s were nearing retirement age in our area but relatively few young people were willing to take over these farm businesses", tells Petra Svensson from the LRF ungdom project who continues, "In order to find ways of encouraging young people to have enough confidence to set up in business and keep our rural communities alive we had the idea of developing a training and coaching support scheme for young entrepreneurs in the green sector."

Some €145 000 of EAFRD co-finance has been allocated to this 'Green Entrepreneur' scheme for costs involved in running and promoting the service, providing training, organising mentoring and assisting young entrepreneurs. "Our goal is to provide the right type of support at the right time for young business people", emphasises Ms Svensson. "We want to help them to build confidence in their own ideas and we do this through a mix of training and peer learning."



© Joakim Didrik

"A particularly useful part of our support service gives the young people access to a network of business contacts in different authorities, banks and other enterprise support providers. Bringing the young people together in regular meetings also helps them to exchange experiences and makes them feel that they are not alone in their efforts", says Ms Svensson. Eight local young people have been helped so far by the scheme to start their own businesses. Interest in the youth initiative continues to spread and social media is being used as an effective promotional tool. For example, by early 2012, the project's Facebook page already had over 180 'fans'.

Equestrian enterprise

One of the young people who has benefitted from this EAFRD project is Joakim Didrik, a 20 year old farmer's son from the village of Haddås. Mr Didrik gained a qualification as an electrician at high school and he is currently pursuing his apprenticeship working in the construction sector. He chose this initial career path to provide him with security but he also held a long-term interest in developing an equestrian enterprise. "Our family have always had horses, both our own and also from people hiring a place in our stable. So I was aware that it could be possible to earn an income from renting stables, providing food for horses, as well as helping with the training of horses and their riders", remarks Mr Didrik, himself a keen equestrian show jumper.

"I had talked with my family about this possibility of setting up an equestrian enterprise and then I heard about the Green Entrepreneur scheme. The scheme seemed very useful for me

because it meant I could gain a lot of important know-how about running a business from the training sessions. My aim was to combine working as an electrician and also start bit by bit to build up my own horse business.”

“Our farm is all organic and my business is based there so the idea was suitable for the Green Entrepreneur scheme. I received a lot of positive feedback on my ideas for the business both from the project leader and from the other participants. It gave me the courage to take the steps to start my business. The scheme also provided me with good advice about how to find funding and apply for investment grants and we also had lecturers from the Tax Agency. We learnt about business planning, advertising and other things that you have to think of and do when starting a business, plus what types of hurdles can arise in business life.”

“Because equestrian businesses can have limited markets to draw on I will have to grow slowly but my plan is to win more and more customers so that I can eventually phase out my other job and focus solely on horses. I want to stay here in my local area because I like it here and I want to show that it is possible to live in the countryside and have a profitable green business here”, concludes Mr Didrik

Handicraft help

Another young entrepreneur who has benefitted from the EAFRD scheme is Caroline Wahl Johansson, a young mother and handicraft artist. She received help from the Green Entrepreneur scheme with her idea to convert her handicraft interests into a commercial operation. “I started to think about this idea when I was on maternity leave with my children. I wanted to be at home with my kids so I started to figure out how I could combine a business at home with taking care of the children, says Mrs Wahl Johansson.



© Caroline Wahl Johansson

Mentoring schemes and follow-up support are effective tools for helping young people and young farmers succeed in starting up their own rural business.

“I can work with my handicrafts even when the kids are around. Sometimes they even try a little themselves. Most of my products are inspired by nature and I use a lot of natural materials that I collect from local forests so you can say my business is a green one. I produce original handicraft pieces and I sell some products from other craftspeople too. In addition I also buy second hand items like furniture and renovate them before selling them in a recycled form.”

“For me the Green Entrepreneur scheme was useful and it meant I could meet with other young entrepreneurial people who shared an idea of running a rural business. Just to see that others also had these kinds of ideas and dared to test them motivated me to continue developing my own ideas”, notes says Mrs Wahl Johansson.

Achievements from the EAFRD project have spurred on LRF ungdom to expand the project concept beyond its original pilot area of Jönköping, and there are now plans to copy the idea in the neighbouring County of Halland. The expansion

proposals will draw on the lessons learnt during the first phase which reiterate the importance of the business mentoring support that was made readily available for the young entrepreneurs during the start-up phases of their ventures into self-employment.

“ *The Youth project category in our NRN's best practice prize scheme is a useful way for encouraging good quality RDP projects for young people* ”

Hans-Olof Stålgren, Swedish Rural Network

Childcare training benefits: helping the parents of Northern Ireland's future rural residents

EAFRD assistance for childcare-related projects can provide beneficial rural services that help to support the early development of children whilst also improve access to the labour market for their parents and childcare workers.

Childcare services represent important rural development tools. Childcare affords increased employment choices for parents from rural communities. This is especially true for women in rural Europe who can often be restricted as a result of traditional family responsibilities. Moreover, childcare helps rural children to integrate and develop at an early age.

These facts about childcare were stressed by Androulla Vassiliou, Member of the European Commission, responsible for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth, at the launch of the Commission's 2011 Communication entitled *Early Childhood Education and Care: Providing all our children with the best start for the world of tomorrow 2011*¹⁰. Commissioner Vassiliou noted how, "Investing in early education and care is one of the best investments we can make for our children, and for Europe's future."

Indeed, childcare investments in rural areas can make direct contributions to EU and Member State Employment Strategy actions, which together aim to increase labour market participation for women and men (aged 20-64) to 75% by 2020. EAFRD support for different types of childcare inputs can be directed to help meet this EU target.

An EU-funded study that *compared childcare provision across Europe*¹¹ underscores the relevance of such EAFRD support for rural childcare services. This study confirmed that affordable and accessible quality childcare provision is extremely important for

working parents but it noted that, in most countries, regional disparities exist in the availability of childcare services. Clear differences were highlighted in services between urban and rural areas and attention was drawn to the differences in the priority which countries gave to improving rural childcare provision.

Childcare capacity

A good example of how the EAFRD can be used to help-strengthen rural childcare capacities is seen in the UK's Northern Ireland region, where Rural Development Programme (RDP) funding has led to more equal opportunities being created for rural parents to access childcare services.

Here the RDP Managing Authority, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD), has its own *Action Plan for young people and children*¹² which includes a '*Children's Champion*¹³'. A dedicated Rural Childcare Programme has also been implemented by DARD with aims to provide solutions that address the distinct challenges faced by rural areas in relation to the delivery of, and access to, rural childcare services.

Funding flowing through the Rural Childcare Programme includes EAFRD co-finance from a 'Farm Family Options Skills Programme' that uses money from the RDP's agricultural training measure. This innovative use of EAFRD creates a flexibility which allows the agricultural training funds to be used for a



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10 http://ec.europa.eu/education/school-education/doc/childhoodcom_en.pdf

11 The provision of childcare services - A comparative review of 30 European countries: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newSId=545&furtherNews=yes>

12 http://www.dardni.gov.uk/children_and_young_people_s_action_plan_2011-2013.pdf

13 http://www.dardni.gov.uk/index/publications/pubs-dard-agenda-for-equality/publications_agenda_for_equality-childrens-champion-tor.htm

variety of farm purposes, including the diversification of skills which can lead to increased supplies of local childcare professionals in rural areas.

Joan Davis from Mid Ulster is one of the people who has benefited from the EAFRD project and she used the Farm Family Options Skills Programme to complete a training course in childcare services. Mrs Davis had had an interest in childcare for a long time and the EAFRD grant scheme gave her a chance to take this forward by gaining a nationally recognised qualification in Children's Care, Learning & Development.

She explains, "Farm incomes were such that I and my husband were looking for alternatives and childcare came to mind as a potential way to bring more income into the household. I thought that childcare could offer me a range of options to fit around my jobs on our farm. I was thinking that I might be able to work with childcare either on the farm or off-farm, such as employment in a crèche or classroom assistant or even establish a childminding facility at home."

Financial feasibility

"However, with daughters at university I felt it was not financially feasible for me to find the money to get the qualification that I would need. But then I read out about the funding support for training that was available from the RDP. I found this information in a brochure about the Farm Family Options Skills Programme. I applied for a grant through the funding programme to study the childcare course and I received £950 (equivalent to around €1100) towards the training costs."

EAFRD is helping childcare services contribute to the economic and social development of rural areas.

"My course was based on a part-time study syllabus which ran between 2009 and 2010. Work experience placements were included in the training and these were helpful for me because they meant I could use my new skills to provide childcare support for a woman's group that provides social support services for rural residents in my home area of Magherafelt."

"As well as attending the woman's group mostly on a weekly basis, I also secured work experience in a primary school for two days per week. These two positions gave me a possibility to put into practice all of the theoretical topics that I was covering during the course, like promoting children's health and physical development, assisting in the planning and implementation of a framework for early education, and many more."

"I am currently working with children in crèches at two different organisations involved with helping rural parents and I feel I have gained very valuable experience from all my work so far. I really enjoy this type of work, and it has made me think more about sometime in the future perhaps starting up some form of childcare service in my own local community."

RDP project funding for childcare training has in this case not only helped improve availability of pre-school support for children and personal development activities for parents in rural areas, but it has also provided new opportunities for diversifying and improving the income on a family farm.

"I am currently working with children in crèches at two different organisations involved with helping rural parents and I feel I have gained very valuable experience from all my work so far."

Joan Davis



Rural tourism opportunities: supporting Spain's young visitor service visionaries

Economic diversification is an important development tool for Europe's countryside and rural tourism is a sector which offers useful income generation opportunities. Nature tourism operations are especially well suited to rural areas and young people are among the promoters of these types of new businesses.



© Almudena García Álvarez

Today's generation of younger people has grown up in a society which is increasingly aware and concerned about environmental issues and the state of the countryside. Younger people know about the importance of looking after the rural environment with a view to protecting the services that it provides them with. Clean air to breathe, fresh water to drink, fertile soil for growing food, and habitats for wildlife are among some of these essential environmental services.

This philosophy of environmental care is embedded into the core of EU rural development policy. An inspiring example of how such a policy priority can be turned into reality on the ground is found in south-western Spain. Here, a young business woman has used EAFRD support from the Extremadura region's Rural Development Programme (RDP) to offer an innovative service through her nature tourism enterprise.

Business diversification

Almudena García Álvarez has made her living from rural tourism since she left school. Her profession as a climbing instructor has provided her with a beneficial insight into the rural tourism industry and she knew this sector could provide her with lasting employment if she was able to diversify. "There will come a time when I will not be able to do my climbing job anymore because it requires physical strength," acknowledges Ms García Álvarez. "That is why I started to think about other jobs that I could do. I have always liked nature and Extremadura is extremely rich in

natural resources so I wanted to find a way to make a living out of nature tourism."

"I was looking for business ideas that could differentiate my company from other tourism operators. Our region lacks specialisation in nature tourism with only a couple of foreign companies working in this field. I decided that bird watching tourism was therefore a niche with good prospects that I could exploit. My idea was to provide a mobile bird watching facility for tourists. I have a good knowledge of our local birdlife, their habitats and conservation needs so I thought I was in an apt position to offer nature tourists a quality service."

"Financial help from the RDP helped me to purchase and convert a caravan into my mobile bird watching service. It would not have been possible without the RDP grant. I did not have the start up capital for such an investment. When you are young you do not have many savings and the banks were not able to help me. It is very difficult to start a business on your own when you don't have a lot of funds, but the RDP grant gave me the helping-hand that I needed."

Ms García Álvarez received nearly €31 000 from the Extremadura RDP (from its budget for encouragement of rural tourism activities) for her rural economic diversification project. Referring to how she used the EAFRD support she recalls, "The first steps were to buy the caravan and then adapt it. All the interior furniture was removed to create a comfortable space for bird watchers.

Then the roof was adapted into an observatory terrace which is accessed through an internal ladder. External cameras were installed which are monitored with Bluetooth equipment from inside. It was fun to paint the caravan in camouflage colours so it fits in well with the surroundings and doesn't scare birds away."

RDP results

Results from the RDP project are encouraging and Ms García Álvarez is satisfied with her new business. "I really like what I do for a living and I do my job with a smile. I am very glad that I am achieving my objective of earning an income from nature tourism. My aim is to build up my clientele and to make my region known to others within and outside it as a first class nature tourism destination. I also want to show that natural resources can be exploited in a sensitive and sustainable way for the benefit of local people, visitors and wildlife."

"I believe that nature tourism could be a growth sector in this part of Spain and other young people could also tap into the assistance that I received from the EAFRD to build the region's nature tourism potential. Nowadays, more than ever due to the economic crisis we are going through, support of this type from the EU and elsewhere is essential. Young people have the capacity and energy to bring new life to rural areas through innovative tourism activities like my mobile bird watching unit."

"This seems very important to me because I can see that the fate of our region's prosperity is still heavily tied to agriculture, but the region's agricultural economy is constantly shrinking. We cannot allow Extremadura's rural areas to become depopulated so we need to find alternatives to keep people here. In order to continue living here, we need to be able to transform the natural resources which we have always relied on. I am fortunate that I have found a unique service that I can offer which complements the region's other more traditional tourism activities, says Ms García Álvarez."

“*Financial help from the RDP helped me to convert a caravan into my mobile bird watching service. It would not have been possible without the RDP grant.*”

Almudena García Álvarez

Young people can use the EAFRD to develop a broad range of sustainable and innovative rural economic opportunities.



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Due to support from the EAFRD, this younger person's novel rural business vision has a brighter future and Ms García Álvarez's also has other ambitions. "My plan is to continue looking for new nature tourism products. It is useful to be able to adapt to what nature offers and each season I seek out new possibilities for clients. For example, now that it is spring and a few drops of water have fallen, it is time for orchids."

"Our area has one of the richest soils for orchids and the mobile observation unit can take visitors on tours to places where they can enjoy the views and take pictures of these magnificent flowers. Another possibility for the future is to identify new destinations around here. My base is close to Portugal's Algarve region so this could be a future wildlife destination for clients."

Future EU foresters: developing career prospects for Finland's young foresters

Young people from rural areas can find employment opportunities in different parts of the EU forest sector, and financial assistance from the EAFRD is being used by young foresters from the Member States to build the potential of their businesses.

European forests have traditionally been a source of timber which we use for various purposes, including construction and wood fuel. Biodiversity conservation, food production, landscape quality, and recreation are some of the other services that our forest resources also provide. These multifunctional characteristics of forests are reflected in EU rural development policy which remains flexible in order to accommodate a diversity of sustainable forest management operations.

A review of *EAFRD project examples in the forestry sector*¹⁴ highlights the scope and magnitude of EU support for multi-functional forestry in Member States. Much of the EAFRD's forest focus remains on employment-related projects. Young foresters can benefit from this funding support through projects which provide: professional training and skills development for young foresters; assistance to forest firms that provide jobs for young people in rural areas; and help to set-up or grow business undertakings of young self-employed foresters.

Young foresters

Atte Pesonen is a young self-employed forester from the Finnish village of Koivumäki in Tavastland County. He is 23 years of age and runs his own small rural business providing machinery services for forest and farm management work. Contracts on Mr Pesonen's

books include transport and slurry spreading services. A core part of his business specialises in processing timber into wood chips as a fuel source for renewable energy systems. EAFRD support from Finland's mainland Rural Development Programme (RDP) has helped Mr Pesonen to enhance this arm of his business services.

He enjoys his job and wants to be able to continue his chosen career in the long-term. "I have lived all my life in my village and I intend to build my future here", says Mr Pesonen who appreciates the satisfaction that he gets from his forest work. "One of the best things about working in forestry is the tranquillity. When the wood chipper is running it can be quite loud at times but having lunch and coffee breaks every day in the quiet of a forest is good for the soul and peace-of-mind."

"I want to build up my business and I believe there are opportunities in my region for this. I think that Tavastland County is one of the best and most productive forest regions in Finland. However, in my opinion, the full potential of these wood resources is not fully explored. It seems to me that there is room for even more local production based on forestry. Bioenergy production for instance could be substantially increased and this is why I sought assistance from the Rural Development Programme. I sense that there is a foreseeable future in this type of forestry enterprise."



© Tim Hudson

Mr Pesonen applied to the RDP's support measure for business creation and development in order to buy a modern and efficient wood chip processing machine.

"My goal was to upgrade my machine to get a newer and bigger chipper, which could produce wood chips with a higher quality. That is to say, smaller chips which are more homogenous in size. These help improve the energy potential of wood chip boilers and, as a higher quality product, they enable me to get a higher price."

Adding value

Such an EAFRD project example highlights the benefits that can be gained for rural businesses by adding value to raw materials like timber. The EAFRD support helped this young forester to part-fund the costs of new technology that was capable of not only adding value to the wood chip quality, but also of increasing productivity. "The new machine produces more chips per working hour and this is another profitability benefit for me. My capacity to handle more timber per hour with a better quality output makes the business more attractive for my customers", affirms Mr Pesonen.

"Grant funding from the Rural Development Programme gave me the security that I needed to get a business loan from the bank to cover the remaining costs of the new machine. Without the grant it would have been very difficult to get the bank loan. The funding and the bank loan have been important to me because they have reduced the level of economic risk in my company."

Funding support from the EAFRD for young (and older) peoples' rural development ideas can hence be a vital lever to attract other development finance into a project. Lending institutions can gain confidence from the 'due diligence' checks made on the business plans of applicants for EU co-finance by managers of EAFRD grant budgets.

Mr Pesonen is conscious of the boost to his business that the EAFRD and bank's financial backing provided. "I now have a good path of business growth potential to build on. I can do this from the basis of a more stable economic situation, which means I can think about how I could expand even further."

Support from the EAFRD can be a vital lever to attract additional financial investments for young peoples' rural development projects.

"I am currently considering what options could be possible for me to improve the services that I offer for transporting and spreading manure materials. I employ other people in this part of my company and I am looking at the possibilities that might be available from spreading treated sewerage as a fertiliser on farmland."



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“ My ability to handle more timber per hour and with a better quality output makes the business more attractive for my customers. ”

Atte Pesonen

Rural youth culture: community project helps young people sustain Bulgaria's rural heritage

EAFRD assistance is involved with modernising a well-used community building for young people in rural Bulgaria which acts as a centre of numerous youth activities including both traditional cultural pastimes and contemporary pursuits.



© Evgeni Nechev

Many young people enjoy participating in different 'youth culture' interests such as music, dance, theatre, sports and entertainment. Rural areas, however, can have difficulties providing these types of youth culture services and this may act as a disincentive for young people to want to stay in the countryside. Other articles in this series draw attention to the problems that are associated with youth migration out of rural Europe and the long-term negative consequences for Europe as a whole that can follow.

EU rural development policy has a specific measure for supporting 'basic services for the economy and rural population'. This support is one of the vehicles which local communities can use to help address this issue through accessing funds to improve the availability of youth culture activities. Additionally, it remains important to note that EU rural development policy is not alone in this task.

A plethora of organisations including development institutions, charities, voluntary sector groups and government authorities from all levels (international, national, regional and local) provide valuable assistance to youth culture projects. Other EU bodies and Funds are also useful sources of youth culture support in rural Europe such as those involved in assisting *regional development*¹⁵ and *social inclusion*¹⁶, as well as *education and culture*¹⁷. The latter for instance sponsors 'umbrella' groups like *Rural Youth Europe*¹⁸.

Examples of how EU rural development policy, via the EAFRD, is contributing to improvements in the availability of youth culture services in our countryside can be found on the *ENRD's database of Rural Development Programme (RDP) projects*¹⁹.

A database case study from Bulgaria's Byala municipality typifies how EAFRD can be used to assist youth culture in rural communities, through restoration and improvements to buildings that are used for youth culture purposes.

Cultural traditions

Located in the north of the country, Byala is one of the nine municipalities of Bulgaria's Ruse region and contains a population of approximately 17 000 inhabitants. Byala faces many challenges that are common across rural Europe in terms of tackling youth migration and these are summarised by the town's deputy mayor, Dimitrina Tzvetkova. "Young people in our community would like to see the area be more modernised with better facilities for them to enjoy themselves. They want their area to be more attractive for themselves but also for other people from the outside that might be able to help them have better job prospects here."

"More of our young people are leaving the town and surrounding region because of the economic crisis and increasing local

15 http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/thefunds/regional/index_en.cfm

16 <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=750>

17 http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/index_en.htm

18 <http://www.ruralyoutheurope.com>

19 http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/policy-in-action/rdp_view/en/view_projects_en.cfm

unemployment. Our RDP project at the community centre intends to help boost the morale of young people in these difficult times by giving them a modernised venue where they can take part in their own youth culture interests."

"Although Byala is quite small in size it has always been a hub of rich cultural history and tradition which young people here still actively participate in. We have had a youth cultural group since 1894 and our community centre continues to be a focal point for conserving and popularising local cultural heritage among young people. This is why we wanted to upgrade our community centre so it could better serve young peoples' needs and be a more attractive place to spend free time", says Ms Tzvetkova.

Multipurpose venue

Youth groups use the Byala centre for rehearsing and performing amateur dramatics, carrying out competitive dancing, learning Bulgarian folk dancing and folklore, plus singing popular songs. A children's book society, art group, Internet club and various sports associations also use the town's community building, which had not been renovated for several decades. RDP co-finance for the centre's rehabilitation was therefore warmly welcomed by all who use the facility.

"With the EAFRD support we are able to improve the quality of life for young people and we are in the process of organising the centre's upgrade. Once completed, we will have a new roof and the full interior will be redecorated. Toilets for disabled people are to be installed because we want the centre to be accessible for everyone and we know that better insulation throughout the building will be good for both energy savings and environmental matters. For the same type of environmental reasons we will also be putting in new and modern systems for heating, water supplies and sewerage management", highlights Ms Tzvetkova.

Young people were involved in the preparatory phases of the EAFRD project, which will result in a significantly improved multipurpose facility that can be enjoyed by young people for many different types of youth culture activity, for many years to come.

Various EU and other funding sources are focused on helping to improve youth culture services in rural communities.

Project work on the community centre also contributes to a wider programme of social inclusion actions for young people in Byala which is being funded by The World Bank in cooperation with local authorities.

Positive outcomes

Denis Bratanov is a young person from Byala who makes use of the centre's sports facilities every day. "I think that the project to improve the community building is very important for the local population, because the people living in the town yearn for cultural events. I believe that the implementation of the project and the reconstruction of the community center will increase the opportunities to have more cultural events in the region. This is a good thing for us and such projects increase my willingness to stay in the region, since it will provide better places where we can spend our recreation time," comments Mr Bratanov.



© Vladimir Karadeniev

“ Our RDP project at the community centre intends to help boost the morale of young people in these difficult times. ”

Dimitrina Tzvetkova, Byala municipality deputy mayor

Nature conservation commitments: Italian young farmer's agri-environment payments produce win-win outcomes for Sardinia

EAFRD support for a young farmer producing organic beef in Sardinia is helping to reinforce the competitiveness of his business and the local rural economy, whilst also reducing risks of negative environmental impacts on the region's vital natural resource base.



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Italy's National Rural Network (NRN) has put a lot of effort into providing a useful selection of support services for its younger audience. This includes specialised websites (www.rural4kids.it and www.rural4teens.it) which aim to explain what rural development does and why rural development is important for these age groups.

Another web tool deployed by the NRN for networking the views and news from younger people is its blog site www.youruralnet.it. Young farmers from all over Italy use this Internet site to discuss and exchange ideas on topics such as farm competitiveness, product quality, marketing, rural energy, biodiversity conservation and landscape management, to name just a few.

Environmental issues have been common debate topics among the blog posts and this reflects the interests of Italian young farmers in natural resources. As in other countries, Italy's young farmers have been taught and understand that they need to balance their needs to make a living with the need to take care of the raw materials that underpin their rural businesses.

Europe's largest organisation of young farmers, [CEJA](http://www.ceja.eu)²⁰, also recognises this basic fact of rural life. CEJA promotes young farmer participation in schemes which help to conserve the countryside's long-term capacity and has recently called for the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reforms to provide a longer list of potential 'greening' measures for farms to choose from²¹.

Agri-environment

Agri-environment schemes co-financed by the EAFRD are one of the CAP's main tools for sustainable agriculture. These greening schemes hold the biggest EAFRD budget at EU level and young farmers throughout Europe are using agri-environment payments to help run their businesses. Andrea Loche from the Italian island of Sardinia is an example of a young farmer who is participating in a typical agri-environment scheme.

Now 36 years young, Mr Loche took over the running of his family's 175 hectare farm at the age of 25. Since then he has focused on his interests in the organic meat sector and he retains a strong passion for his farming business. "What I like most about working and living in the countryside is the sense of freedom I have from being in the environment on my farm. I really appreciate the closeness to nature that my job involves", says Mr Loche.

Conservation of his land's natural qualities remains a priority for Mr Loche, who has made good use of funding from an agri-environment scheme which is available for organic production methods through Sardinia's Rural Development Programme (RDP). EAFRD co-finance from this agri-environment scheme provides annual payments of approximately €62 for each hectare of land that Mr Loche keeps in organic condition. These payments follow EU agri-environment rules and can be claimed for a five year continuous period. In Mr Loche's case, the payments are conditional on him providing annual assurances that his farm meets precise organic standards.

20 European Council of Young Farmers: <http://www.ceja.eu>

21 CEJA press release of 02/03/2012: CEJA President calls for improvement of greening modalities

“My business relies on my ability to manage my land and livestock in ways that allow my meat products to be officially classified as organic by Italy’s national certification body. This classification allows me to sell my products at a premium price because people know that it is high quality and produced safely on a farm which takes care of and respects natural resources. The agri-environment payments help me to compensate for the higher costs that can be involved with farming my land and rearing my animals in this organic way on Sardinia.”

“Organic agriculture techniques that I use include rotating the fodder crops that I grow so that different crops grow in different fields each year. This is good for the soils since we make sure that every field is sown regularly with plants like clover and legumes which put natural nutrients such as nitrogen back into the soil. This means we need to use less fertiliser and the only fertiliser we use is organic manure or non-synthesised supplements. Our crop rotation also prevents a build up of pests which may become accustomed to living off of a particular plant. I find that this has positive knock-on benefits for my livestock since when I rotate my crops they are less exposed to diseases caused by these sorts of pests.”

“Another important method for conserving my soil quality, and so its ability to produce fodder for my livestock, is making sure that I don’t have too many animals in one area at the same time. Soils in Sardinia can be very sensitive to overuse and damage by livestock pressure so we need to limit animal stocking densities to protect the soil”, explains Mr Loche. Similar situations occur in most Member States’ soils where farmers (young and older) are aware that livestock management is a key tool for sustainable use of agricultural land.

Business benefits

Agri-environment support from the EAFRD for Mr Loche’s free-range beef cattle business has helped him to become a well respected farmer in Sardinia. He is also a municipality mayor and has been able to promote his passion for organic agricultural systems through playing a lead role in setting up a new producers group for organic businesses.

Young farmers can be the engines for new rural development ideas such as setting up producer groups to cooperate and improve the competitiveness of their members.

“I was involved in founding the organisation ‘Consorzio Produttori Sardegna Bio’ which is a group of producers that now has 130 members. All the members of our group produce food and feed that is classified as organic by the national certification body. By working together, we as smaller businesses can enjoy the benefits that a bigger enterprise has. We see that this helps us to promote the sale of a wider variety of local organic products across a larger number of market outlets,” highlights Mr Loche.

Collaborative approaches to strengthening the supply chain of organic produce from smaller farms fits well with some of the EU’s strategic aims for rural development policy. Hence, the methods adopted by this Italian young farmer and his colleagues can be considered to have good potential for replication in other parts of the EU.



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“ *By working together, we as smaller businesses can enjoy the benefits that a bigger enterprise has.* ”

Andrea Loche

The European Network for Rural Development ONLINE

<http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/>

The screenshot shows the ENRD website interface. At the top, there's a blue header with the European Commission logo and the title 'European Network for Rural Development'. Below the header is a navigation menu. The main content area features a map of Europe with country flags, a search bar, and several news items. A prominent green starburst graphic is overlaid on the right side of the screenshot, containing a call to action for a survey.

*<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/JY773BL>



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