# EIP-AGRI Workshop
## EIP-AGRI networking & communication

FINAL REPORT
4-5 October 2016

funded by European Commission

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# 1.  Introduction

"Fostering innovation" was an important new objective for rural networking for 2014-2020, and the RDP Managing Authorities have programmed many new networking activities for supporting implementation of the EIP-AGRI at national / regional level.  In line with Article 54 of the Rural Development Regulation (and associated guidance) there are four main areas of activity for the rural networks:

a)  raising awareness of, and involvement in, the EIP-AGRI amongst relevant stakeholders;
b)  facilitating the search for Operational Group (OG) partners;
c)  networking for advisers and innovation support services, and;
d)  collecting and disseminating examples of OG projects.

But how exactly have these obligations been interpreted?  What supporting activities for the EIP-AGRI have been put in place?  And how are they being resourced and implemented?

With almost all of the National Rural Networks (NRNs) in place and actively working by the autumn of 2016, plus calls for OGs launched in at least 13 Member States, it was a good time to bring together the rural network support units – as well as other dedicated EIP-AGRI support entities – to share and learn from their growing practical experience and thereby strengthen networking for the EIP-AGRI.  On 4-5 October 2016, DG AGRI, with the support of the Hungarian Ministry of Agriculture, therefore organised a workshop in Budapest dedicated to **developing the role of the National Rural Networks (NRNs) and other dedicated networks supporting the EIP-AGRI.**

The workshop had the **following specific objectives**:

1.  To **identify** the diversity of management structures, approaches and activities being used by rural networks to support implementation of the EIP-AGRI in the different Member States / regions

2.  To **exchange** practical experiences and lessons learnt about the specific networking and communication tools being used to support implementation of the EIP-AGRI, and

3.  To **promote** the ongoing development and strengthening of network support for full and effective implementation of the EIP-AGRI in the current programming period

This report gives a brief overview of the presentations and discussions that took place.  More information on the workshop is available via the **EIP-AGRI website**.  Links to the agenda, list of participants, presentations and supporting documents are also included in **Section 5 (Further Reading)** of this report.

## 2.  Overview of the workshop

The workshop attracted a lot of interest. A total of 73 participants from 24 Member States attended the workshop – the majority of whom (see **participants list**) were NRNs or other dedicated EIP-AGRI support entities.

The workshop had a very practical focus and all presenters and participants were encouraged to not only share their positive experiences of what approaches and tools were working best, but also the day-to-day challenges of working to support the EIP-AGRI.

Preparation for the workshop began in July 2016 with the launch of a **survey of the network support units** to develop a 'snapshot' of the management structures and range of practical activities / good practices being used or planned by NRNs and other related networks to support implementation of the EIP-AGRI at national / regional level.

Sirpa Karjalainen (DG AGRI) started **Day 1** of the workshop by setting the scene with a **presentation** of the results of the survey, in the context of the different actions and tools that are needed throughout the 'life cycle' of an Operational Group.  She explained that most NRN experience to date was inevitably associated with raising awareness of the EIP-AGRI amongst relevant stakeholders (Task 1), facilitating the search for OG partners (Task 2) and networking for advisers and innovation support services (Task 3).  Only in a few cases have preparations been made for the dissemination of OG project results (Task 4).

The full results of the pre-workshop survey can be viewed **here**.

Day 1 continued with the presentation of six different models of network support for EIP-AGRI Operational Groups from **Hungary**, **Sweden** and **Poland** (all with national RDPs), followed by **Germany**, **Spain** and **Italy** (all with regional RDPs).  After a rich Q&A session, the workshop was divided into three groups for interactive discussions about the main types of tools currently used for EIP-AGRI networking.  The outcomes of this exchange of experience are summarised in **Section 3**.

**Day 2** kicked off with Fabio Cossu and Inge Van Oost (DG AGRI) **presenting** the background and specific obligations regarding the longer-term task of collecting and disseminating examples of OG projects (Task 4).  There is a growing appetite for information about the EIP-AGRI from all actors involved and a number of specific mechanisms are being put in place by the EIP-AGRI network to ensure that all existing knowledge, including that generated by the Operational Groups, is freely available to all.  Several online resources are already in place on the EIP-AGRI website, including the new **EIP-AGRI Toolkit**, plus the **EIP-AGRI projects database** which will be increasingly populated with descriptions of OG projects (as well as the results from Horizon 2020 multi-actor projects and thematic networks) using the EIP-AGRI common format and practice abstracts.

The description of communication activities at the EU level was then complemented by the experiences / lessons already learnt from different approaches to activating and running the national EIP-AGRI networks in **Austria**, **France** and **Germany**.

Day 2 concluded with an open discussion on practical issues for strengthening network support for Operational Groups (see **Section 4**).

## State of play with Operational Group (OG) calls and approvals

Participants arriving at the workshop were asked to give brief details of the current state of play regarding Operational Group (OG) calls and approvals in their national / regional Rural Development Programmes (RDPs).

It emerged that OG calls had been launched in at least 13 Member States with calls currently open or already closed in:

- **Austria** – two calls already opened and 7 OGs selected from first call. Waiting for results of second call (closed 30 September 2016)
- **Belgium** – first call opened in Flanders in 2016 with 5 OGs selected
- **Czech Republic** – first call due to close 31 October 2016
- **Germany** – calls opened in at least two Länder with a total of 69 OGs selected to date
- **Spain** – calls opened in at least 4 regions. The very first call was launched in Cataluña in 2015 with a total of 23 OGs selected. A second call closed in Cataluña in early July 2016
- **Finland** – one call opened in 2016. Results of the call were not known at the time of the workshop
- **France** – more than 20 calls opened to date in 15 regions. A total of 48 OGs selected by the end of June 2016
- **Italy** – calls opened in at least one region with a total of 54 OGs selected
- **Lithuania** – one call opened in 2016 with 4 OGs selected
- **Netherlands** – calls in two regions opened in 2016
- **Portugal** – first call was still open in October 2016 with a high level of interest reported
- **Sweden** – a continuous open call with two meetings of the Selection Committee already organised. A total of 12 OGs reported to have been approved, but not yet officially notified
- **United Kingdom** – a total of four calls already organised in two regions with 13 OGs reported to have been approved



The majority of the remaining Member States / regions envisaged launching their first calls at the end of 2016 / beginning of 2017.

The total number of approved OGs (approved projects + signed contracts) was estimated to be around 200, compared to the total of 3,205 OGs planned in the 94 Member States / regions with funding available under Measure 16 of their 2014-2020 RDPs.
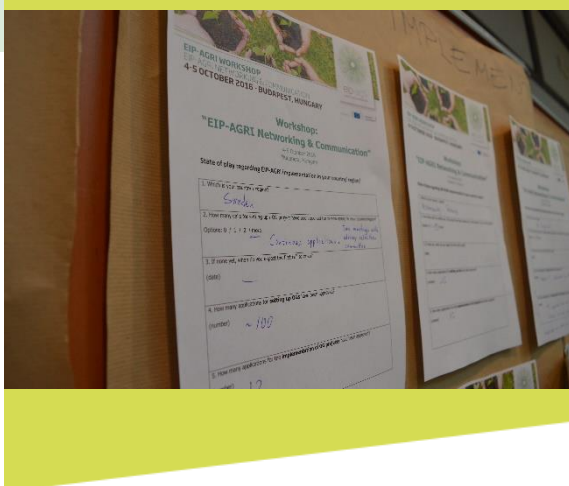
# 3. Exchange of experiences on networking tools for the EIP-AGRI

The objective of this interactive session was to identify what the best tools and approaches are for fulfilling the main NRN tasks to support implementation of the EIP-AGRI – and why?

Three groups of tools / approaches were examined:

- **'Offline' tools** - such as face-to-face meetings, events, Focus Groups etc.
- **'Online' tools** - such as website tools, E-learning, databases etc.
- **'Media' tools** - such as press articles, video and broadcast, newsletters etc.

Each of these was assessed against the 4 main NRN tasks regarding support for the EIP-AGRI:

Task 1 - raising awareness of the EIP-AGRI amongst relevant stakeholders
Task 2 - facilitating the search for Operational Group (OG) partners
Task 3 - networking for advisers and innovation support services
Task 4 - collecting and disseminating examples of Operational Group (OG) projects

## 'Offline' Tools

| Networking Tools | NRN Tasks | Strengths | Potential challenges |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Advisory Services** | 1, 2, 3 & 4 | • Close to – and trusted by - farmers<br>• Also a trusted intermediate between other types of stakeholder<br>• Can "translate" between the language of researchers and farmers<br>• Advisers can help to identify, articulate and communicate the needs of farmers<br>• Advisers have a broad perspective and can explain the value / advantages of cooperation | • Advisers don't work in isolation, they need support and must be kept updated on new policies etc.<br>• Advisers need to be open-minded to effectively make the transition from "instructor" to "facilitator"<br>• Without adequate resources, Task 2 (facilitating the search for OG partners) can be challenging<br>• Risk of overloading advisers with too many functions<br>• Advisory services are not sufficiently well-developed in all Member States |
| **Innovation Support Services (ISS)** | 1, 2, 3 & 4 | • A well-resourced ISS can be very effective<br>• ISS can quickly establish personal contacts and build trust with clients<br>• ISS are well-informed and therefore able to provide quick answers to questions | • Must ensure adequate resources (human + financial) for ISS to be effective<br>• ISS personnel must be well-informed to provide the best possible advice to OGs<br>• Providing the right information at the right time is the key issue for supporting OGs.  The information needs of OGs will vary during their life cycle |
| **Face-to-face meetings** | 1, 2, 3 & 4 | • Good for rapidly connecting with potential OG partners<br>• Important for building trust, especially with farmers<br>• Direct interaction with potential OG partners can help avoid the risk of misunderstanding | • Very time-consuming<br>• Need to be well-resourced (human + financial)<br>• Good meetings need to be well-structured to be as effective as possible and thereby justify the resources committed |
| **Focus Groups** | 1, 2 & 4 | • Good for peer-to-peer knowledge exchange and transfer<br>• Good for 'focusing' themes and incubating new ideas<br>• Focus Groups work well as 'connectors' between networks and often function as sub-networks bringing together stakeholders with diverse interests | • When organising Focus Groups, sufficient attention must be given to selecting a) the best theme / question for discussion, and b) the right mix of participants |

| Networking Tools | NRN Tasks | Strengths | Potential challenges |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Training** | 1, 2 & 3 | • Good for knowledge transfer<br>• Easy to ensure quality and consistency of the information communicated<br>• Can be combined with other approaches e.g. online tools | • Participants expect content of training to be 100% up to date<br>• Trainers must be able to maintain the interest / attention of participants<br>• Not good for fostering interaction or incubating new ideas |
| **Innovation camps** | 1, 2 & 3 | • Very participatory and interactive<br>• Excellent for engaging people and building partnerships<br>• Proven to be effective in several Member States, including Portugal, Finland and Sweden | • Lack of good moderators experienced with the methodology |

## 'Online' Tools

| Networking Tools | NRN Tasks | Strengths | Potential challenges |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Websites** | 1, 2, 3 & 4 | • Many good examples exist at national and EU level<br>• Provides a multi-functional platform<br>• Widely accessible (open)<br>• Can be quickly updated<br>• Excellent for linking different sources of information<br>• Potential for multiple interfaces with different types of user | • Not all rural actors / potential users are online / well-connected<br>• Websites must be simple and easy to use<br>• Even for accessible / user-friendly websites, users must still be <u>willing</u> to use the website for the purpose it is intended for<br>• Websites and their functions need to be promoted<br>• Website must be maintained and continuity of service ensured |
| **Partner search tools** | 2 & 3 | • Online partner search tools are simple, easy-to-use, effective and efficient<br>• No personal data protection problems since people volunteer to share their data | • Not all rural actors / potential users are online / well-connected<br>• Some people will inevitably be unwilling to register and share information / data online<br>• There is always some risk of misuse<br>• Partner search tools must be actively maintained (e.g. periodically cleaned) and continuity of service ensured |
| **One-way communication tools** | 1 & 4 | • Many good examples of effective one-way communication tools being used by networks e.g. e-mail newsletters, Youtube videos, blogs, infographics etc.<br>• A large potential audience can be accessed (via many online channels) with these communication tools<br>• These tools are well-known and the process of making full and effective use of them is clearly understood | • Not all rural actors / potential users are online / well-connected<br>• Easy to overlook that even the simplest one-way communication tool must define its target group in order to be effective and efficient |
| **Two-way (interactive) communication tools** | 1, 2, 3 & 4 | • Many good examples of effective two-way communication tools being used by networks e.g. social media, online forums etc.<br>• These tools are low cost, quick and easy to use<br>• Smartphones are a widespread platform for many interactive communication tools<br>• Great advantage of interactive online tools is the possibility of | • Not all rural actors / potential users are online / well-connected<br>• These tools are susceptible to misuse<br>• Some two-way communication tools need management, animation and/or moderation<br>• Interactive online communication tools can be time-consuming for users and animators / moderators |

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| | | rapid responses, immediate feedback and instant user gratification | |
| **E-learning** | 1, 2, 3 & 4 | • Several good examples exist e.g. EAFRD training for NRNs in France <br> • Low cost option for delivering training <br> • E-learning tools can be very effective <br> • Can be used to support continuous professional development of a partnership such as an Operational Group | • Not all rural actors / potential users are online / well-connected <br> • Effective e-learning resources must be well-designed and well-prepared – this is a skilled job <br> • E-learning resources used in a dynamic practical / policy context need updating regularly <br> • Some potential users are put off by the lack of human contact |
| **Resource centres** | 1, 2, 3 & 4 | • Many good examples of online resource centres e.g. smartphone apps, project databases, searchable document libraries etc. <br> • East to use and popular with users <br> • Relatively straightforward to set up, but development of search functions may need specialist input | • Not all rural actors / potential users are online / well-connected <br> • Need regular updating to ensure ongoing added value to users <br> • The coordination / connection of different databases can be challenging |

## 'Media' Tools

| Networking Tools | NRN Tasks | Strengths | Potential challenges |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Regional and local newspapers** | 1 & 4 | • Low cost<br>• Regional / local newspapers are always looking for 'stories', so it can be easy to get published<br>• Well-written, journalistic articles are powerful communication tools<br>• Very good for putting the EIP-AGRI into the context of local farming issues | • Beware of poor quality journalism, consider using a professional communicator to write articles<br>• Regional / local newspapers may not reach the relevant target groups for the EIP-AGRI<br>• Newspapers are 'disposable', do not expect farmers etc. to refer to them more than once |
| **Social media** | 1 & 4 | • Low cost and easy to use<br>• Several good examples exist e.g. Portuguese NRN Facebook page<br>• Smartphones are a widespread platform for social media | • Not all rural actors / potential users are online / well-connected<br>• Social media may not be used by all target groups for the EIP-AGRI<br>• Optimising the use of social media needs some planning / specialist experience |
| **Brochures and flyers** | 1 & 4 | • Low cost<br>• Easy to read and understand<br>• Easy to disseminate – both printed, by e-mail or online<br>• Total control over content<br>• Very flexible format that can be adapted to many different topics<br>• Great to hand out on the spot at events etc. when people are looking for information and are motivated to read | • Brochures and flyers are 'disposable', do not expect farmers to refer to them repeatedly<br>• Content always needs to be fresh, relevant and attractive, otherwise will be treated like "junkmail"<br>• Brochures and flyers can take a lot of effort to circulate widely (with the possible exception of electronic formats) |
| **Radio and TV** | 1, 2 & 4 | • Some NRNs have made very effective use of Radio and TV for promoting LEADER (and other RDP measures) – this experience can easily be applied to the EIP-AGRI<br>• Innovation and the EIP-AGRI is an attractive news story for local radio and TV<br>• Can be high impact reaching a wide audience | • Whilst some radio / TV appearances may be *ad hoc*, the majority should be planned more strategically. Be clear about the target group and the messages to be communicated |
| **Films and video** | 1, 2 & 4 | • Several good examples exist e.g. the tutorial video from the Italian NRN on *"How to build an Operational Group"*<br>• Many NRNs already have experience with videos about RDP projects | • Can be expensive to make<br>• Films and videos need to be well planned to deliver tangible practical information to farmers and others |

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| | | • Good medium for communicating the concept of interactive innovation and OGs <br><br> • Very flexible and powerful medium e.g. can be both funny and informative | |
| **Farmers journals and agri-magazines** | 1, 2, 3 & 4 | • There are lots of trade and specialist journals / magazines targeted at different types of farmers – these are an excellent medium for promoting the EIP-AGRI <br><br> • The greatest strength of these publications is a) their credibility amongst farmers and b) the specialists who write for them <br><br> • These publications want detailed technical articles <br><br> • Although circulations are relatively low, the potential impact on key target groups for the EIP-AGRI is high | • Need to develop a good 'story-line' for journalists – this requires some work <br><br> • Importance of the printed journals / magazines is declining. Use a diversity of communication channels in a coordinated and strategic way |

# 4. Practical issues for strengthening network support for Operational Groups

During the final session on Day 2 of the workshop the participants were invited to lead a number of open discussions about practical networking issues that were of interest / concern to them. A total of 8 discussions were initiated, many of which picked up themes from the Day 1 exchange of experiences on networking tools for the EIP-AGRI. Note that the value of these open discussions is the interaction and sharing of ideas, knowledge and experience that takes places on the spot, therefore only a brief snapshot of the discussions is presented below.

| | |
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| **Issues of confidentiality**<br>An important issue that many workshop participants were keen to clarify and discuss – how much information from the Operational Groups actually needs to be disseminated? And when? | **Linking with the broader innovation 'ecosystem'**<br>Building links with other innovation-related networks and initiatives is a specific issue for the French NRN, but with relevant conclusions and lessons for other rural networks |
| **Building better databases**<br>Effective online databases are highly valued by end users, but many NRNs are required to use official formats which are unattractive, inaccessible and have limited content. What are the key elements / principles for building databases that really engage people with relevant information and real functionality as a networking tool? | **How to support development of the "interactive innovation" model amongst Operational Groups**<br>A broad ranging and deep discussion about three key questions at the heart of networking for the EIP-AGRI: i) what exactly is interactive innovation in practical terms; ii) how to build effective rural partnerships to deliver this interactive innovation, and; iii) what are the priority processes to support with the limited resources available to most NRNs |
| **Ideas for an event to raise awareness about innovation and the EIP-AGRI**<br>A focused discussion about a forthcoming event being organised by the Greek NRN. Lots of practical information was shared | **Engaging Operational Groups with Focus Groups and Thematic Networks**<br>A very interesting, slightly more strategic, discussion about optimising the functionality and interactivity of different elements of the EIP-AGRI. As more Operational Groups are approved, the opportunity for, and potential added value of, their engagement with Focus Groups and Horizon 2020 Thematic Networks will increase greatly |
| **How to support / develop the role of the agricultural advisory services**<br>Agricultural advisory services have a potential key role to play in the establishment and running of Operational Groups. However, in order to optimise this role, many advisers need support and appropriate resources to foster the transition from their classical role as "instructors" to their new role as "facilitators" | **The role of an Innovation Support Service**<br>A deep and rich discussion led by the Scottish NRN. Lots of detailed practical experience and lessons learnt was shared by other NRNs and dedicated EIP-AGRI support entities regarding both the specific functions of an Innovation Support Service and considerations for setting up such a service to support national / regional implementation of the EIP-AGRI |

# 5. Further reading

## Presentations from Tuesday, 4 October 2016

- **Networking for the EIP-AGRI** - Sirpa Karjalainen (DG AGRI)
- **Setting up operational innovation groups and supporting investment for implementing innovative projects** - Attila Nagy (Hungarian NRN)
- **EIP-AGRI communication by press/media in Sweden** - Inger Pehrson (Swedish Rural Network)
- **The Polish model of network support for EIP-AGRI Operational Groups** - Iwona Obojska (Agricultural Advisory Centre, Poland)
- **National Rural Support Unit (DVS) EIP-AGRI innovation support system** - Natascha Orthen (German NRN Unit - DVS)
- **Spanish Focus Group on irrigation, energy and environment** - Carolina Gutiérrez (Spanish Ministry of Agriculture)
- **The Italian National Rural Network** - Riccardo Passero (Italian Rural Network)

## Presentations from Wednesday, 5 October 2016

- **Fulfilling the EIP-AGRI: Communicating and connecting Operational Groups** - Fabio Cossu & Inge Van Oost (DG AGRI)
- **Austrian National Rural Network** - Johanna Stieblehner (Austrian NRN)
- **EIP networking in France** - Pascale Riccoboni (National Support Unit for EIP, France)
- **EIP-AGRI free access database** - Natascha Orthen (German NRN Unit - DVS)

## Workshop documents

- **Final programme**
- **Participants list**
- **Speakers' CVs**
- **Outcomes survey "Networking for the EIP-AGRI"**

**The European Innovation Partnership** 'Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability' (EIP-AGRI) is one of five EIPs launched by the European Commission in a bid to promote rapid modernisation by stepping up innovation efforts.

The **EIP-AGRI** aims to catalyse the innovation process in the **agricultural and forestry sectors** by bringing **research and practice closer together** – in research and innovation projects as well as *through* the EIP-AGRI network.

**EIPs aim** to streamline, simplify and better coordinate existing instruments and initiatives and complement them with actions where necessary. Two specific funding sources are particularly important for the EIP-AGRI:

✓ the EU Research and Innovation framework, Horizon 2020,
✓ the EU Rural Development Policy.
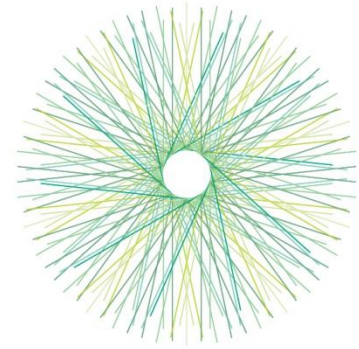
funded by European Commission

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