European Evaluation Helpdesk for Rural Development

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Rural Evaluation NEWS

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE EUROPEAN EVALUATION HELPDESK FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Assessment of RDP results: HOW TO PREPARE FOR REPORTING ON EVALUATION IN 2017

Towards a result-oriented approach

In the programming period 2014-2020, closer scrutiny is being placed on where and how well public money is spent in all EU policy areas. Increasingly, the European Commission, policy makers, programme authorities, and the general public (we as taxpayers), want to know the results of public spending in addressing the EU and national/regional rural development objectives and priorities.

As part of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), a new monitoring and evaluation system for rural development has been set up. This system will provide all interested stakeholders with key information on rural development implementation, its results and impacts. It places special emphasis on a result-oriented approach to policy implementation.

Showing the evidence for what the policy is achieving

In an effort to check if the implementation of rural development policy is progressing well and to show its achievements, the new system foresees reporting at Rural Development Programme (RDP) level in sequential steps, which are closely interwoven with and feed into

Meeting of the Thematic Working Group and Sounding Board

the reporting on the CAP and ESI Funds. Standard annual reporting will begin in 2016 for RDPs, and continue each year, providing information on programme implementation, the progress in evaluation activities, as well as any other issues affecting RDP performance. In 2017 and 2019, the Managing Authorities will submit enhanced Annual Implementation Reports (AIR), which will contain evaluation findings, such as the quantification of programme achievements, answers to evaluation questions and (in 2019) the progress towards EU 2020 Strategy objectives.

These reports will serve as an intrinsic information source for relevant stakeholders, as well as for the Commission, >

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the European Parliament, the Council, and the European Court of Auditors, to achieve a result-oriented approach to future policy decision-making.

The first stocktaking of RDP's results in 2017

The assessment of RDPs in 2017 is a critical step on the path to attaining effective evaluations across the whole programming period. Managing Authorities will not only report on monitoring information, but will, for the first time, also include real evaluation findings for the reporting period between 2014-2016. For this purpose functionally independent evaluators will:

- Quantify programme achievements with the help of result indicators (complementary result indicators, programme-specific indicators and additional indicators);
- Assess primary and secondary contributions of completed RDP operations;
- Answer evaluation questions related to focus areas and other aspects.

In addition to showing what the policy has delivered, the evaluation activities for this AIR will also be the first real test of the fitness of the monitoring and data management systems in the Member States and their ability to provide the necessary evidence to assess the results of the RDPs in 2017 and beyond.

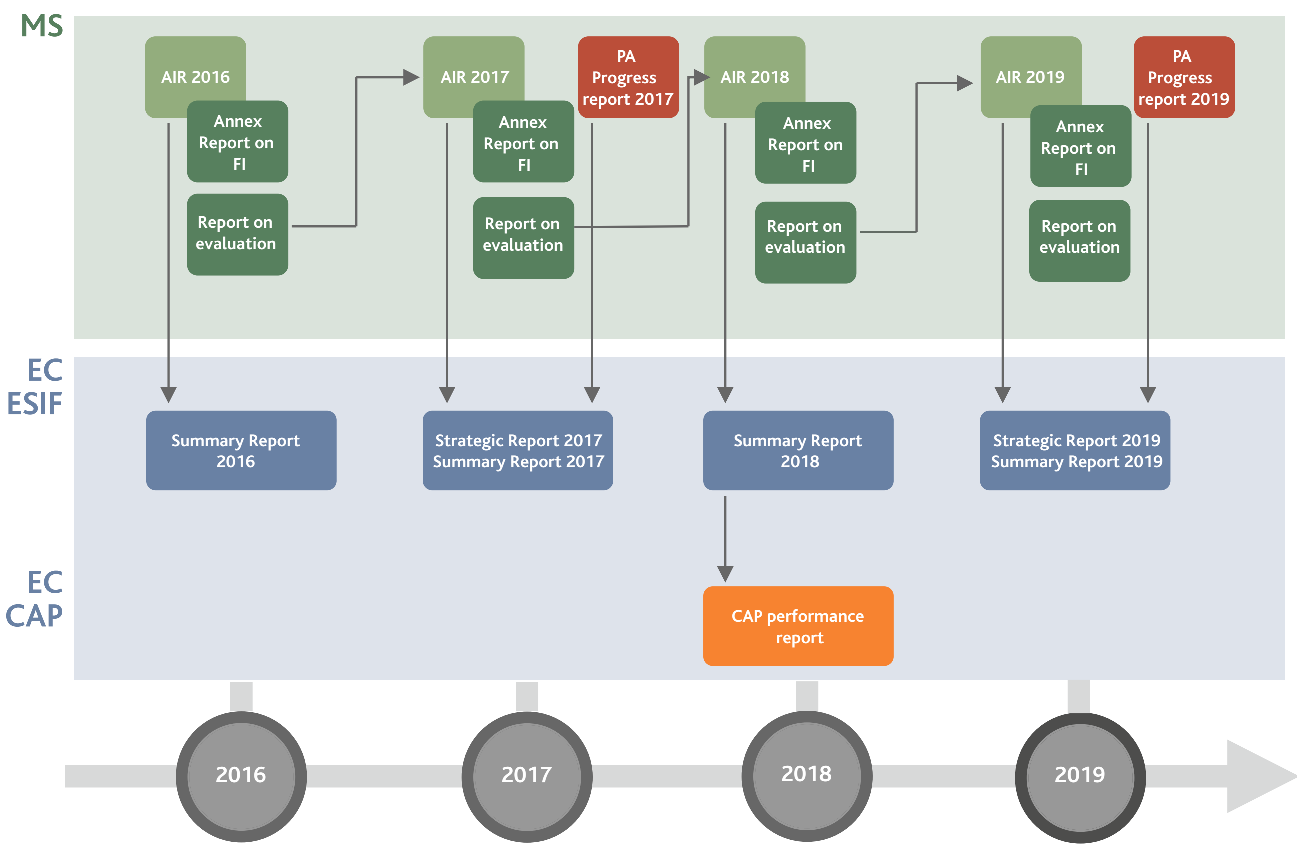
What are the main challenges?

In order to fulfil the objectives of the assessment of RDP results in 2017 and later impacts in 2019, Member States need to take into account the specificities of the new programming period and prepare now to apply sound methodologies by:

- **Complementing the evaluation elements for each RDP:** Flexibility in programming has several implications on evaluation. Measures are no longer attributed to one specific "axis" as in the past, but can now be programmed under different Union priorities/focus areas and programme-specific objectives. This flexibility, however, requires that the monitoring and evaluation system be adapted specifically to each RDP. In order to capture the full effects of a given RDP, the common system has to be complemented with programme-specific elements (evaluation questions and indicators).

- **Building up the evidence basis for robust evaluations:** Member States need to decide now which data is required in order to capture real results in 2017 and future impacts of the

Overview of reporting requirements and links 2016-2019



Source: European Evaluation Helpdesk for Rural Development, 2015

programme in 2019. This data must include baseline values of indicators and should ideally be in line with selected methods. Data needed to answer the evaluation questions should be identified early on and specified in tender specifications for evaluators. Existing data sources need to be identified and assessed for their suitability in each RDP evaluation.

- **Assessing the net effects:** Only net values of result and impact indicators show the real contribution of RDPs to changes observed in programme areas and targeted rural sectors. This calls for the application of advanced evaluation methods. For 2017, the result indicators will be calculated in the form of gross and/or net values. For 2019, the net values of all results and impact indicators will be provided. It is important to procure sufficient data on beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries in the system. Only under these conditions will it be possible to compare control groups and determine the values of result indicators necessary to answer the evaluation questions related to focus areas and other aspects already required in 2017 evaluation.

- **Assessment of secondary contributions:** It is important to demonstrate the full extent of what rural development policy achieves. Therefore, the quantification and assessment of indicators will be based on both primary and secondary contributions of completed operations. Secondary contributions are additional contributions of operations to focus areas other than those to which they are primarily attributed. The legal framework asks for a flagging of the intended secondary contributions when the programme is designed. The validity of flagging might be revisited during the preparation of evaluation in 2017 and corrected if necessary. Sampling will allow for the estimation of additional contributions of operations to focus areas.

- **Reporting on evaluation:** The evaluation reporting will be done through an AIR SFC template for each of the evaluation questions. The template necessitates not only a clear statement, but also the values from which the statement is derived. The AIR SFC template allows space for programme-specific evaluation questions.

- **Quantification of indicators in case of low or no programme uptake:** Due to the late start of RDPs, some Member States may be faced with too few completed operations to assess result indicators. If this is the case, common and programme-specific result indicators should still be calculated for those RDP measures and focus areas showing sufficient programme uptake. For measures with low uptake, it is necessary to take into consideration any information available on potential beneficiaries (e.g. assess the total available population of beneficiaries: applications, existing/ongoing contracts) and to justify why result indicators could not be calculated as required. In the case of no uptake, methods based on the theory of change or qualitative assessments can be used to attain evidence on the potential RDP achievements. Previous evaluations and studies may also provide useful information for the 2017 AIR.

- **Proportionality in the assessment of programme results and impacts:** Regardless of the size of the RDP, the effects have to be assessed. The approaches and methods can be simpler, e.g. total population instead of sampling, qualitative methods, etc.

Guidelines to prepare the evaluation of AIRs in 2017

In order to achieve a common understanding of what is required in the AIR 2017 and to guide stakeholders in the development of the necessary information, the Evaluation Helpdesk has launched the Thematic Working Group (TWG) "Assessment of RDP results: how to prepare for reporting on the evaluation in 2017". The principal outcome of this TWG is a guidelines document developed in collaboration with evaluation experts from the Member States, members of the Expert Group on Monitoring and Evaluating the CAP, DG AGRI officials and the Evaluation Helpdesk. The guidelines will be published at the beginning of 2016 and reflect the EU's common legal framework, as well as the diverse needs of the stakeholders in Member States in preparing, conducting and reporting on evaluation in 2017. The guidelines will provide the foundation of knowledge required for public officials and the evaluation community in Member States to complete the 2017 evaluation.

The guidelines lead stakeholders through the phases of planning, preparing, conducting and reporting on evaluation for the AIRs to be submitted in 2017. They provide advice on issues such as how to:

- Make the necessary provisions in the RDP's monitoring and evaluation system triggered by the flexibility in programming of EAFRD interventions.
- Ensure that programme-specific result indicators have been properly assessed and related evaluation questions answered in a robust manner.
- Consider the proper use of complementary result indicators.
- Address the assessment of additional contributions of rural development operations to focus areas under which they have not been programmed but to which they also make a contribution.

The guidelines put a major focus on the proper preparation of the evaluation system, aiming to facilitate the reporting of first results not only in 2017 but keeping in mind also, the need for continual evaluation throughout the entire programming period.

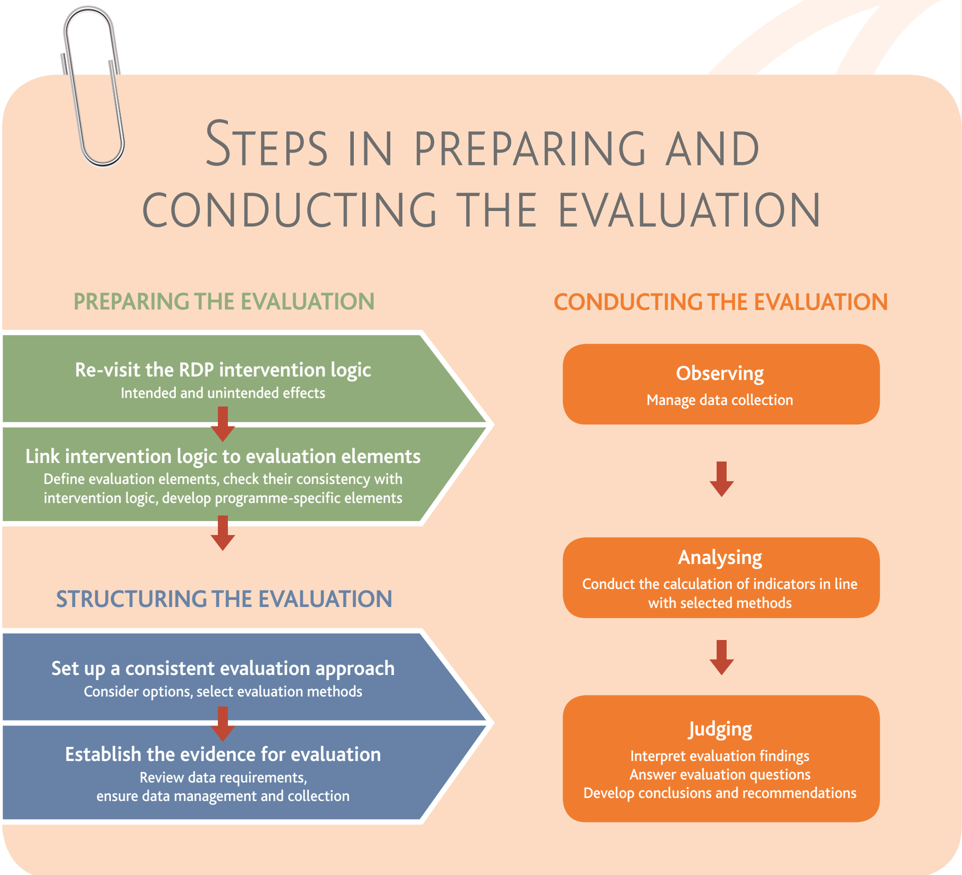
Key aspects to be offered in the guidelines

Managing Authorities are provided with information and recommendations as to what needs to be reported in 2017, including RDP-specific elements. Major attention has been given to what should be reported on the evaluation and how to ensure the quality of information provided in the 2017 AIR. The guidelines also explain how to approach issues of governance and the management of the evaluation, including the involvement of various actors and the communication of evaluation results.

Evaluators will be offered a step-by-step process to better answer the evaluation questions in 2017. Existing working documents, such as fiches for target and complementary result indicators or common evaluation questions for 2014-2020 RDPs, are taken into consideration in preparing and answering the evaluation questions.

Practical tools, templates and checklists are included and help stakeholders to prepare, conduct and report on the evaluation in 2017. For example, the proposed SFC template for point 7 of the AIR submitted in 2017, provides an overview of reporting requirements, check-lists for self-assessment of the quality of the evaluation report, etc. In separate self-standing documents further useful material will be provided to Member States (templates for answering common evaluation questions (CEQs), good practice examples, etc.).

Structured presentations in appropriate forums will accompany the publication of the guidelines. Also envisaged in these forums are sessions aimed at facilitating a practical exchange between evaluation stakeholders of the Member States. ■



Source: European Evaluation Helpdesk for Rural Development. 2015

First Good Practice Workshop: 27-28 October 2015, Vilnius, Lithuania

The first Good Practice Workshop co-organised by the Evaluation Helpdesk, the Baltic Environmental Forum and the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Lithuania, "**Assessing environmental effects of rural development programmes: practical solutions for the ex post evaluation 2007-2013**" took place on 27-28 October 2015 in Vilnius, Lithuania.

The Evaluation Helpdesk is responsible for organising and facilitating Good Practice Workshops on issues of interest to evaluation stakeholders. A Good Practice Workshop is a meeting open to evaluation stakeholders, to exchange experiences on specific topics, to provide a forum to discuss good practices, lessons learned, and to identify and assess approaches to improve evaluation practices.

The aim of the workshop was to facilitate an exchange between Member States with regard to their practical challenges in assessing RDP's environmental results and impacts in the context of the ex post evaluation of RDPs 2007-2013. Presenters from the FP7-project Envieval provided methodological inputs and contributed with practical case studies to exemplify potential solutions.

This workshop was conducted at a critical juncture in time with most Managing Authorities still in the process of conducting the ex post evaluation of 2007-2013 RDPs while at the same time attempting to establish the basics for assessing environmental impacts on the new RDPs for 2014-2020. This Good Practice Workshop provided a forum to reflect on practical problems encountered in assessing environmental impacts, and to attempt to draw out what lessons could be learned for the latest programming period.

The event was well attended, having 52 participants, including members of the European Commission, Managing Authorities, evaluators, and academics from 16 Member States.

The **Good Practice Workshop** was conducted over the course of two days with the first day consisting of a stimulating selection of presentations and discussions, including four case studies on topics concerning:

- the approach for the **assessment of environmental impacts** taken by the Lithuanian RDP;
- challenges in evaluating the impacts of RDPs on **climate stability** in Italy and Finland;
- challenges in evaluating the impacts of RDPs on **soil quality** in Hungary and Scotland;
- evaluation of agri-environmental schemes with the objective of **biodiversity** in Estonia.

Introductory presentations were made on topics including the expectations of the European Commission, evaluation challenges (e.g. necessary data requirements and possible methodologies) and stakeholder expectations. On the second day, participants were broken into working groups, where they endeavoured to find practical solutions for difficulties highlighted in the case study presentations. Participants then shared their experiences in a collaborative format.

The key takeaway points and lessons of workshop participants were as follows:

(i) Proxy indicators can be a valuable and cost-efficient means to assessing environmental impacts in cases where evaluators have a deficit of existing data or the data is of too poor quality to be used for more concrete direct common indicators. Proxy indicators can be used not only as an alternative to common indicators but also as a complement to improve the level of robustness.

(ii) Data availability and quality are essential for ex post evaluation to be achieved. It is therefore necessary for all stakeholders to work together to assess what data improvements are needed, the most common data gaps, and how to realise long-term data availability concerning environmental effects. Managing Authorities should make a greater effort to retain the rights to data, consider providing longer-term contracts to ensure consistent and ongoing data collection, and facilitate researchers and evaluators in the building of more sophisticated models. An essential step needed in many Member States is to increase the degree of coordination and information sharing between ministries (e.g. agriculture and environment), in order to prevent redundancies in data collection, encourage compatibility for RDP evaluation, and reduce costs. Further capacity building for data collection and advanced statistical modelling is needed to facilitate both the building of future models and management of current models.

(iii) Determining the amount of resources to facilitate an adequate evaluation is a ubiquitous and unresolved question for many evaluation stakeholders. Participants shared country-specific experiences, concluding that while regionally the cost of evaluations vary significantly between Member States, it is necessary that Member States find a cost-efficient level that encourages high quality evaluations and incentivises a competitive tendering process to achieve the highest quality outcomes. ■

Getting prepared for the evaluation of National Rural Networks 2014-2020!

National rural networks (NRNs) bring together administrations and organisations active in rural development. NRNs can either operate as specific interventions within a single Rural Development Programme (RDP) or be established and operate as a stand-alone programme[1] (national rural network programme – NRNP)[2].

Objectives of NRNs:

Networking by the NRN aims to:

a) **Increase stakeholder involvement** in the implementation of rural development;
b) **Improve implementation quality** in Rural Development Programmes;
c) **Inform broader public** and potential beneficiaries on rural development policy and funding opportunities;
d) **Foster innovation in agriculture, food production, forestry and rural areas.**

NRNs are subject to monitoring and evaluation with a view to improve the quality, effectiveness and efficiency of their operations and their impacts. Further assessment should also reflect on the added value generated through broader rural networking, creating of social capital and improved governance in rural areas. The achievements of NRN´s objectives, as well as their results, impacts and added value are important means to justify and legitimise funds spent by the rural networks at European, national and regional levels, especially in times when resources are tight and very limited. Evaluation of NRNs also permits showing the stakeholders and taxpayers how money was spent, what has been achieved and at what cost. In this way, the transparency and accountability of NRN´s interventions are enhanced.

Factors of success and failure can be internal or external. Internal factors can consist of issues connected with the administration and delivery of NRN activities, e.g. functioning of Network Support Unit (NSU), while external factors could be due to problems of networking culture in rural areas, or the lack of it. These internal and external factors can either serve to strengthen or weaken the effects of NRN activities.

Experiences collected in Member States during the previous programming period have shown that the evaluation of NRNs is faced with methodological challenges due to the specific character of NRN interventions. These challenges are predominantly linked to:

- the set-up of a coherent NRN intervention logic;
- the definition of appropriate programme-specific indicators (especially at result and impact level), which correctly correspond with evaluation questions;
- conceptual challenges in assessing rural network´s results/ impacts to capture NRN´s effects on broad networking;
- sufficient high quality data and information;
- management and governance of NRN evaluations;
- the approach to realising the added value of NRN´s.

In the previous programming period, stand-alone evaluations had been carried out mainly for NRNPs, whereas NRNs were mostly evaluated as part of the RDP. Most of these NRN evaluations were predominantly qualitative in nature and only considered output indicators to assess NRN achievements. A lack of precedent and several methodological challenges stemming from the distinctive nature of NRN interventions has made previous evaluations difficult.

In the current programming period more consistent intervention logic for NRNs has been suggested and more stringent common evaluation elements have been introduced. This will allow for improved evaluations to be conducted. However, these common elements only characterise the basis for NRN evaluation. Member States, in collaboration with NRN evaluation stakeholders, need to complete the NRN intervention logic with programme-specific objectives and groups of activities. Furthermore, it is vital to think of NRN expected results and impacts, set up programme-specific evaluation questions for the NRNs and develop the respective result and impact indicators to measure these NRN achievements.

1. In case of Member States with regional RDPs
2. Article 54 (1) of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013

Key Steps to Successful evaluations

An early emphasis on key facets of the planning and preparation steps of the NRN evaluation process will serve as a solid foundation to ensure later success in the evaluation process.

Planning of NRN evaluations

When commissioning an evaluation, fundamental precepts should be followed in order to achieve a high quality of evaluation. When considering evaluations of NRNs, the process can be broken up into three parts: planning, preparing and managing the evaluation. Different aspects of the NRN can be assessed in this process: a) full evaluations, which include the assessment of efficiency, effectiveness, relevance and impact; b) evaluations of NRN intervention logic; c) evaluations of network structure. Dissemination and communication of evaluation results should also be taken into account at an early stage.

Communication as a strategic early activity

In the preparation phase, special attention should be given to planning communications and capacity building approaches to be implemented throughout the evaluation. Even though most of the communication activity occurs at the end of the evaluation process, it is essential to communicate throughout the evaluation process. This will provide a clear picture of what kinds of information should be transmitted to different evaluation stakeholders, by whom and at what point.

Review of intervention logic

Review of intervention logic is an important step in the preparation of evaluations. In many cases, however, the intervention logic is already constructed at the programming stage. The process of constructing the intervention logic is based on networking context analysis, the SWOT and needs assessment, as well as the common NRN objectives and groups of activities, spelled out in Article 54 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013. The Member States should complete the intervention logic by defining NRN-specific objectives and activities. This step is followed by the specification of NRN outputs, results and impacts. If the intervention logic already exists, the Managing Authority, NSU or evaluator are advised to conduct a review of the intervention logic.

Definition of evaluation elements

The preparation process continues with the development or review of evaluation elements (evaluation questions, judgement criteria and indicators). The legal framework specifies some common elements (intervention logic, 4 objectives, 7 groups of actions, 1 evaluation question and 3 output indicators). These common elements only represent the basis for NRN evaluations and refer principally to evaluations of NRNs as part of RDP evaluations. Self-standing evaluations require substantial elaboration of evaluation elements. Hence, the Member States are expected to complement the common elements with NRN-specific elements. Evaluation questions should be derived from the common or NRN-specific objectives. Each evaluation question should be accompanied by judgement criteria, specifying the individual questions and linking them to the indicators.

Information sources for NRN evaluation

Subsequently, it is necessary to identify which data and information are needed to answer the evaluation questions. The sources of the data should be listed, and it should be clearly outlined which data can be obtained from the Managing Authority, Paying Agency or the NSU and which information should be collected additionally by the evaluator. Most information relating to NRN evaluations will be qualitative due to the nature of NRN actions and the fact that there will not be abundant quantitative data available. Hence, qualitative or mixed methods will be applied more frequently within NRN evaluations.

Taking into account early on the strategic components of the planning and preparation steps will allow evaluation stakeholders to achieve better quality evaluations. Ultimately, it will also facilitate the role of evaluation as an important governance tool in the policy cycle, contributing positively to the implementation of policy instruments and funds.

To support evaluation stakeholders in conducting their tasks, guidelines on evaluating NRNs have recently been developed by a Thematic Working Group under the guidance of the Evaluation Helpdesk and in close collaboration with the European Commission and the Member States. The guidelines not only help to plan and prepare evaluations but also give further recommendations on how to implement a NRN evaluation as a stand-alone exercise or as part of a programme evaluation. Further capacity building activities of the Evaluation Helpdesk to aid in the evaluation of NRNs are foreseen in 2016.

Guidelines for the Evaluation of National Rural Networks

"Guidelines: Evaluation of National Rural Networks 2014-2020" is a non-binding document, which serves to complement the legal requirements relating to NRN evaluations. The document clarifies the common elements related to NRN evaluations and gives a wider set of recommendations on how to formulate and manage NRN evaluations, both as a stand-alone exercise and as a part of RDP evaluations. The guidelines are drafted to be a practical, hands-on guide for NRN evaluation stakeholders. They include step-by-step recommendations on the process and available methodologies for evaluation of the NRN.

The guidelines give practical guidance on specific issues relating to NRN evaluation: (1) the design and assessment of NRN intervention logic, and (2) the choice and application of qualitative methods.

The guidelines are divided into four parts. The Introduction familiarises the reader with overarching themes. Part I discusses the procedure for planning, preparing and managing the evaluation for the commissioning party (Managing Authority or NSU). Part II gives advice to evaluators on how to conduct the evaluation, and Part III includes an overview of some qualitative methods that can be used in the evaluation of networks, as well as example templates and tables.

The guidelines on evaluating NRNs will be completed in early 2016. ■

Send your questions to:

info@ruralevaluation.eu

ENVIEVAL: New Evaluation Methods for the Future

Evaluations of environmental impacts of RDPs are characterised by a number of methodological challenges. Robust counterfactuals are critical to enable a clear attribution of observed environmental changes to implemented policy measures and programmes. This requires the consideration of sample selection issues in the design of comparison groups. However, recent methodological developments have improved the understanding and capacity of analysing the impacts of farming and forestry on the provision of different main public goods. Against this background, the main aim of ENVIEVAL is to test the contributions of new indicators and methods to address the main challenges in environmental evaluations and to develop a conceptual and methodological framework for the evaluation of environmental impacts of rural development measures and programmes in EU Member States.

ENVIEVAL: Development and application of new methodological frameworks for the evaluation of environmental impacts of rural development programmes in the EU, is an EU collaborative project (the Thünen Institute, the James Hutton Institute, Agricultural University of Athens (AUA), Natural Resources Institute Finland (LUKE), Council for Agricultural Research and Economics (CREA), Baltic Environmental Forum (BEF), and Szent Istvan University (Grant Agreement No. 312071) in the Seventh Framework Programme. http://www.envieval.eu/

The new methodological frameworks provide guidance on the selection and application of cost-effective evaluation methods to estimate net effects of rural development measures and programmes on the different main public goods from farming and forestry.

Testing methodological approaches against real world conditions

The state and extent of the provision of different public goods from agriculture such as climate stability, biodiversity, water quality, soil quality, landscapes and animal welfare, as well as the priorities in the rural development programmes, vary greatly across the different rural environments in the project partner countries including Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania and the UK. These cases provided a diverse setting for the testing of improved approaches to evaluate the environmental impacts of RDPs, through differences in the provision of public goods, agricultural structures and data (requirements, availability and access). The main purpose of the public goods case studies was to test the potential contributions of the selected indicators and methods to address the main challenges in the evaluation of environmental impacts of RDPs. In addition, the case studies were used to test the practical applicability of the methodological framework developed for environmental RDP evaluations. The main challenges for the evaluation of environmental impacts of RDPs were identified at the beginning of the project and validated through stakeholder consultations with evaluators, representatives from Managing Authorities, monitoring organisations across different countries in the EU and the Evaluation Helpdesk. The results of the public goods case studies provided:

- contributions of additional (non-CMES) indicators tested to address indicator gaps,
- contributions of advanced modelling approaches tested at micro and macro levels for dealing with the complexity of public goods, considering other intervening factors and providing solutions for situations without participants (or very limited non-participants),
- contributions to the integration of counterfactuals and sample selection issues in environmental evaluations of RDPs.

Data issues were of particular importance in all of the case studies. Data requirements of the selected indicators and methods were assessed and case study areas with relatively good data availability selected. An important aspect of the case studies was the identification of data gaps and the provision of practical solutions for dealing with the data gaps.

Methodological handbook for environmental evaluations

The results of the case study testing inform the development of a user-friendly methodological handbook for environmental evaluations of RDP results and impacts in 2017 and 2019 and the ex post evaluation of the RDPs 2014-2020. The handbook is mainly targeted at evaluators, providing guidance to design cost-effective evaluation approaches for the specific evaluation task at hand. The handbook will also highlight key issues relevant for Managing Authorities, for example in relation to existing data planning and gaps and the importance of administrative issues, such as the length of evaluation contracts. In addition to the valuable guidelines for the ex post evaluation and for the evaluation of results in 2017 produced, by the Evaluation Helpdesk, the ENVIEVAL handbook will focus in particular on methodological aspects of environmental evaluations and cover a range of environmental indicators and methods.

Solutions to overcome data gaps for comparison groups

Issues in relation to data gaps and access to data are major constraints of the effectiveness of applying advanced evaluation methods and direct environmental indicators. Results of the ENVIEVAL project show that even in situations with data gaps, at least some sample selection issues can be considered through an ad hoc approach in the design of comparison groups:

- In micro level cases, application of advanced statistics based approaches with smaller samples and data gaps can still improve the robustness of the results compared to using ad hoc approaches to deal with sample selection issues.
- In macro level cases, advanced modelling approaches can provide a theoretical alternative for before-and-after counterfactual assessment of the environmental impacts of RDPs, e.g.:
  1. In cases of area-wide implementation of measures, where non-participants do not exist;
  2. In cases where aggregated macro level evaluation of programme effects exist.

Choosing evaluation approach dependent on data availability

The choice of an evaluation approach depends on data availability and the possibilities to construct a counterfactual. Essentially, this means that the evaluator may need to prioritise the result and impact indicators available and see the level of counterfactual analysis possible in each case before choosing the method of constructing the counterfactual (unless more than one approach is used). A relatively poor proxy indicator with a good counterfactual may not be preferable to a good direct environmental indicator with more circumstantial evidence on impact.

Increasing cost-effectiveness in evaluation through evaluation planning

Additional and/or specifically targeted environmental monitoring programmes are needed to enable a cost-effective application of advanced evaluation approaches, and to fully utilise their potential. The cost-effectiveness of environmental evaluations of RDPs would substantially be improved by integrating data requirements of impact assessments into the development of evaluation plans right from the beginning of the planning process. ■

EvaluationWORKS!

Yearly capacity building events

The Evaluation Helpdesk has increased its focus on capacity building in the Member States through new and innovative activities, including yearly capacity building events in the new programming period. Yearly capacity building events provide an annual forum for:

- The exchange of information and learning for all stakeholders involved in RDP evaluation;
- Discussions on an array of challenging topics with the goal of building greater capacity for all participants;
- Sharing the outcomes of discussions with stakeholders in the Member States and the EU.

The capacity building events "EvaluationWORKS!" provide the opportunity for Member States and stakeholders to be actively involved in the entire process, giving them full ownership of the outcomes. In this respect, events are organised in easily accessible locations and run in the local language.

The Geographic Expert of the Evaluation Helpdesk organises the event in close partnership with local Managing Authorities or the responsible ministry. The discussions of these meetings are reported and shared with meeting participants, and relevant findings are summarised and prepared for a wider audience at the EU level allowing for feedback to the EU level and a mutual learning process.

Indicative target groups include:

- Managing Authorities, Paying Agencies, Monitoring Committee members, Evaluation Steering Groups, NRNs, and LAG managers.

Workshop content

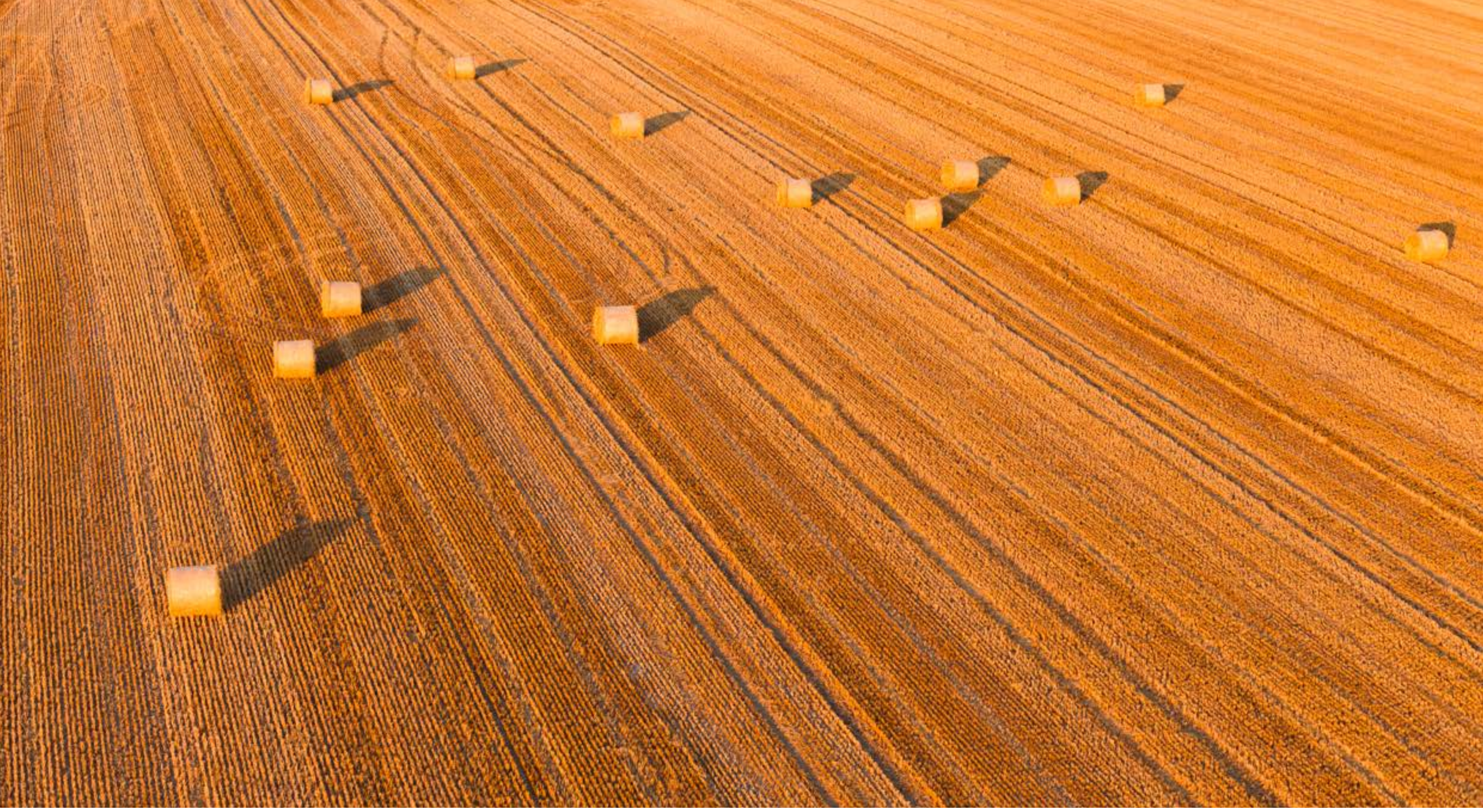
Topics for "EvaluationWORKS!" 2015 have been identified by stakeholders through the Annual Stakeholder Survey. Geographic Experts interviewed a sample of NRNs and Managing Authorities to identify needs regarding ex post evaluation, data collection, the Common Monitoring and Evaluation System (CMES) and the evaluation of NRNs.

Three primary topics have been identified for capacity building through this survey. Member States can choose one or more topics to be covered in their training event to tailor these events to their specific needs. The three core topics identified for 2015 are as follows:

TOPICS CHOSEN BY MEMBER STATES

MODULE A	MODULE B	MODULE C
The CMES BE (WL), CY, EE, EL, PT, RO	**Setting up the system to answer EQs** CZ, DE, FI, PL, SK	**Evaluation of LEADER/CLLD/LDS** ES, LU, LV, SE, SI

Introduction to CMES (+ MODULE B or C)
AT, BG, BE (VL), DK, HR, HU, LT, MT, NL, IT, IE + UK



MODULE A: The CMES
- Purpose and use of the CMES
- CMES elements and their links
- Differences between the CMES and the CMEF

MODULE B: Setting up the system to answer Evaluation Questions (EQs)
- Purpose of EQs and their requirements
- When to answer which questions in 2017/2019
- How to establish a system to answer EQs

MODULE C: Evaluation of LEADER /CLLD/LDS
- European Commission requirements on evaluation of LEADER
- Role of actors in supporting evaluation at RDP/LAG level
- Specificities of LEADER evaluation RDP/LAG level

The Evaluation Helpdesk carries out capacity building events in the Member States in the form of interactive workshops, animated by the Helpdesk's Geographic Experts and supported by material prepared by the Helpdesk and tailored to each Member State's needs.

Based on these capacity building events, Geographic Experts report key information to the Helpdesk, which will be used to compile a summary report, "Annual Capacity Building Events in the Member States".

Two capacity building events in Slovenia and the Czech Republic serve to exemplify the topics discussed during these novel exercises. ■

EVALUATIONWORKS!
SLOVENIA 2015

This event focused on strengthening capacities for monitoring and evaluation of local development strategies (LDS).
Participants were guided and discussed, (1) understanding of evaluations in the policy cycle, (2) how to use elements of the monitoring and evaluation system in the LDS, and (3) how to build capacities to plan evaluation of LDS.

EVALUATIONWORKS!
THE CZECH REPUBLIC 2015

This event focused on the topic of setting up the system for answering the EQs.
The main objective of this event was to facilitate participants to learn about, (1) the purpose of EQs, (2) familiarise themselves with which questions need to be answered in 2017 and 2019, (3) understand the steps for answering EQs, and (4) how to address the challenges caused by the flexibility in programming.

Self-assessment versus evaluation: what are the differences?

Self-assessment is an ongoing reflective process that is designed and conducted by those who implement an intervention or are part of it (e.g. programme managers, beneficiaries, network members). It generates an inside view on the activities and focuses on the overall performance. Involved actors analyse the way in which they do things and ask themselves how they contribute to the achievement of the agreed objectives and goals. The participatory nature of self-assessment induces learning effects among all those who are part of it.

Evaluation, by contrast, provides an independent external point of view on the interventions (e.g. programmes, projects, and networks) and assesses to what extent the objectives have been achieved and what outcomes (results and impacts) have been produced with allocated inputs. The scope of evaluation is often predefined by legislation or by the client of the evaluation. Evaluation helps to improve the accountability of the money spent and ensures that the interventions are carried out in line with the policy objectives and feed into policy design. In practical terms, the final judgement is developed based on rigorous methods, through means of predefined evaluation questions, judgement criteria and indicators.

It is a good practice to connect both exercises: Evaluation can use the evidence collected through self-assessment as one of the possible information sources when assessing the intervention's efficiency, effectiveness, results and impacts. Self-assessment may use evaluation results in order to further stimulate self-reflection and learning among all actors. ■

SELF-ASSESSMENT		EVALUATION
Carried out by **actors involved** in intervention (programme managers, beneficiaries, etc.)	**Who?**	Carried out by **independent external evaluator** (contracted by the Managing Authority, ministry, etc.)
• To facilitate steering and management; • Induce learning effects; • Show added value.	**Why?**	• To show if the intervention works and contributes to the policy objectives; • To facilitate direction for implementation and policy design.
• Assess the **delivery process**; • Assess the **perceived added value**; • Identify **areas for improvement**.	**What?**	• Assess **efficiency, effectiveness, achievements, results, impacts**, and contributions towards policy objectives; • Check relevance of intervention.
Formative, process-oriented, mainly qualitative methods.	**How?**	**Summative**, results-oriented, mix of quantitative and qualitative methods.
Monitoring and reporting information, feedback sheets, etc.	**On what basis?**	Information from monitoring (and self-assessment) as well as additional information collected by the evaluator.
Recommendations for improvement of action plan, management and delivery.	**Outcome?**	**Recommendations** for the the improvement of intervention logic, relevance of intervention, and policy design.

Source: European Evaluation Helpdesk for Rural Development. 2015

The Expert Group on Monitoring and Evaluating the CAP

The 8th meeting of the Expert Group on Monitoring and Evaluating the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) took place on 12 November 2015. This meeting was attended by representatives of the European Commission and the Member States.

DG AGRI updated experts on newly available documents and provided information on Member States' notifications on greening and monitoring indicators for greening. The Evaluation Helpdesk presented the draft final guidelines of the Thematic Working Group, "Assessment of RDP results: how to prepare for reporting on evaluation in 2017", the draft guidelines of the Thematic Working Group "Evaluation of NRNs 2014-2020", and the first results from the capacity building events organised in the Member States. In the following pages this article will focus attention on providing an in-depth look at the presentation made by Gesa Wesseler from DG AGRI, Unit E.3.

DG AGRI, Unit E.3 (Economic analysis of EU agriculture) presented the data sources for the CAP context indicators 2014-2020 that are readily available for evaluation purposes and of particular interest to our readers.

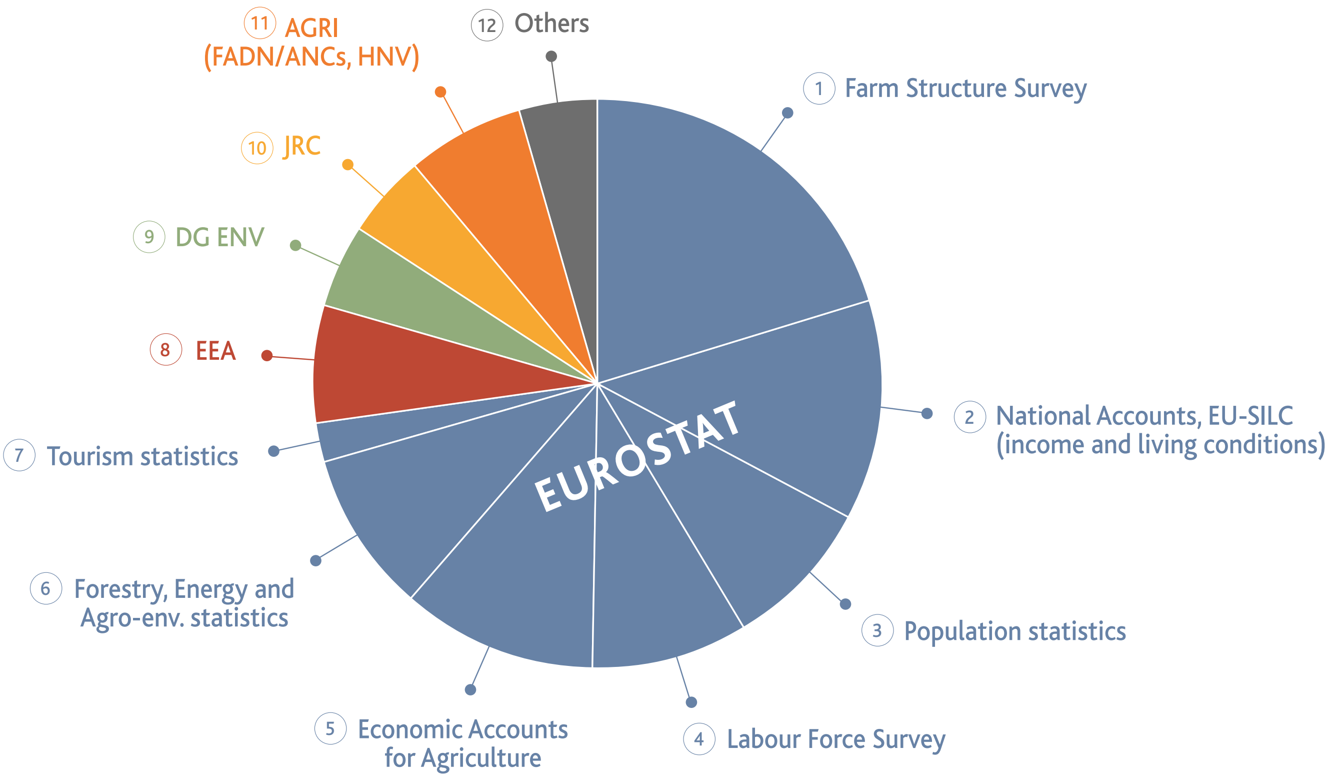
The CAP context indicators reflect relevant aspects of the general contextual trends in the economy, environment and society that are likely to have an influence on the implementation, achievements and performance of the CAP (Article 1(d) and Section 4 of the Annex to Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No 834/2014). A set of 45 indicators (Annex IV to Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No 808/2014) describes the general context in which policy measures are designed, planned and implemented. These indicators form part of the monitoring and evaluation framework for the CAP 2014-2020 and are used in RDPs to provide a comprehensive overall description of the current situation of the programming area. The European Commission provides an annual update of data (subject to availability) for these indicators. A specific section on the Europa website is also dedicated to CAP indicators with short analytical texts, key downloadable tables, graphs and maps. The diagramme presents the available EU data sources linked to the type of indicator, the frequency of the data updates and how the data is collected.

Data gaps identified at the EU level:

- The absence of a unique and harmonised data collection system;
- The absence of a legal basis for data collection (primarily concerning environmental indicators);
- The frequency of data dissemination, which is variable and sometimes discontinued;
- The level of geographical detail (national, regional).

Finally, the European Commission concluded that for most of the common context indicators it relies on EU level data sources, which are not always complete or not regularly updated or often not available at the regional level. Therefore, it is essential to identify data availability at the Member State level ahead of time in order to submit the relevant reports to the European Commission in a timely fashion. ■

EU data sources linked to the types of indicator



1 Agriculture structure and practices
C.17 - C.18 - C.19 - C.20 - C.21 - C.22 - C.23 - C.24 - C.33.2 - C.39

UPDATE
- Every 3-4 years
- Full agricultural census every 10 years
- 2 intermediate sample surveys (last in 2013)

COLLECTION
- All Member States on a harmonised (legal) basis to collect farm-level information at different geographic level

3 Population and territory
C.01 - C.02 - C.03 - C.04

UPDATE
- Annually
- Population census every 10 years

COLLECTION
- Member States report to Eurostat their population 1st Jan. Demography data collections are done on a voluntary basis

2 Economic development and structure of the economy
C.08 - C.09 - C.10 - C.11 - C.12 - C.16

UPDATE
- Annually (some even quarterly)

COLLECTION
- Each Member State separately in accordance with the European system of National and Regional Accounts 2010

4 Employment
C.05 - C.06 - C.07 - C.13

UPDATE
- Quarterly, and
- Annually

COLLECTION
- Member States provide Eurostat with data from National Labour Force Surveys. They cover all economic sectors including agriculture

5 Agricultural income and output
C.14 - C.25 - C.26 - C.27 - C.28

UPDATE
- National and regional data disseminated annually

COLLECTION
- National statistical institutes or Ministries of Agriculture collect data and calculate national EAA
- Eurostat produces aggregated data for EU

6 Forestry, agro-env. and energy
C.15 - C.29 - C.35 - C.40.1 - C.43.1 - C.44

UPDATE
- Forestry: annual for accounting data; biannual for wood products data
- AE: depends on type of indicator
- Energy: annual basis by MS

COLLECTION
- Forestry: MS correspond through Joint Forest Sector questionnaire
- Forestry & AE: gentlemen's agreement basis
- Energy: joint annual OECD/IEA – UNECE questionnaires

7 Tourism
C.30

UPDATE
- Data disseminated monthly and annually

COLLECTION
- Data collected via surveys filled by accommodation establishments
- Travellers' surveys

8 9 Env., biodiversity and climate
C.31 - C.34 - C.36 - C.40.2 - C.45

UPDATE
- Corine Land Cover: every 6 years
- Natura 2000: annually
- Conservation status of habitat types and species: every 6 years
- EU GHG inventory: annually
- WISE: annually

COLLECTION
- Corine Land Cover: cooperation with EEA Members and GMES/Copernicus
- Natura 2000: data submitted by MS to DG ENVConservation status of habitat types and species: MS monitor habitat types and species of Community interest
- EU GHG inventory: national submissions to UNFCCC WISE: partnership between EC and EEA on water knowledge

10 Soil
C.41 - C.42

UPDATE
- Topsoil, CLC, Copernicus, GAES depends on input data availability
- LUCAS survey: annually

COLLECTION
- JRC provides estimates based on an empirical computer model (RUSLE) + LUCAS
- Map of topsoil organic carbon content elaborated by JRC arising from LUCAS

11 Agro-env.
C.32 - C.33.1 - C.37

UPDATE
- FADN: annually
- ANCs: RDP reporting
- HNV: depending on data sources

COLLECTION
- FADN: surveys carried out by MS on accountancy data collected from a sample of agricultural holdings
- ANCs: reported by MS to DG AGRI in their RDPs
- HNV: reported and estimated by MS via methods and relying on national/regional data sources

12 Forest and energy
C.43.1 - C.38

UPDATE
- EurObserv'ER, EBB and ePURE: annually
- SoEF – Forest Europe/UNECE/FAO: every 5 years

COLLECTION
- EurObserv'ER, EBB and ePURE: data on production of biogas, biodiesel and bioethanol
- SoEF – Forest Europe/UNECE/FAO: data collection for the Forest Europe report relying on a set of Pan-European criteria and indicators

Calendar - What's on?

October 2015:

- **SI – 14 October 2015** – Helpdesk capacity building event on the evaluation of LEADER/CLLD. Read more >>>
- **PL – 19 October 2015** – Helpdesk capacity building event on setting up the system to answer EQs. Read more >>>
- **RO – 19 October 2015** – Helpdesk capacity building event on the CMES. Read more >>>
- **HU – 19 October 2015** – Helpdesk capacity building event on the CMES and setting up the system to answer EQs. Read more >>>

- **BE – 19 October 2015 – ENRD workshop on self-assessment:** The Helpdesk presents the differences between self-assessment and evaluation. Read more >>>

- **BE – 20 October 2015 – EU Rural Networks' Steering Group:** The Helpdesk presents its annual work programme, announcing new thematic work on LEADER/CLLD, as well as events on HNV, ex post evaluation, and NRN evaluation. Read more >>>

- **LT – 21 October 2015** – Helpdesk capacity building event on the CMES and setting up the system to answer EQs. Read more >>>
- **CZ – 26 October 2015** – Helpdesk capacity building event on setting up the system to answer EQs. Read more >>>
- **FI – 26 October 2015** – Helpdesk capacity building event on setting up the system to answer EQs. Read more >>>
- **DK – 27 October 2015** – Helpdesk capacity building event on setting up the system to answer EQs, and the evaluation of LEADER/CLLD. Read more >>>

- **LT – 27-28 October: Good Practice Workshop on the assessment of environmental effects:** Organised by the Evaluation Helpdesk, Baltic Environmental Forum and Ministry of Agrigulture, Lithuania. Read more >>>

- **SE – 28 October 2015** – Helpdesk capacity building event on the evaluation of LEADER/CLLD. Read more >>>
- **SK – 28 October 2015** – Helpdesk capacity building event on setting up the system to answer EQs. Read more >>>
- **AT – 29 October 2015** – Helpdesk capacity building event on the CMES and setting up the system to answer EQs. Read more >>>
- **BE(VL) & NL – 29 October 2015** – Helpdesk capacity building event on the evaluation of LEADER/CLLD. Read more >>>

November 2015:

- **PT – 3 November 2015** – Helpdesk capacity building event on the CMES. Read more >>>
- **BG – 5 November 2015** – Helpdesk capacity building event on setting up the system to answer EQs. Read more >>>
- **MT – 9 November 2015** – Helpdesk capacity building event on the CMES and setting up the system to answer EQs. Read more >>>
- **BE (WL) – 10 November 2015** – Helpdesk capacity building event on the CMES. Read more >>>

- **BE – 12 November 2015 – 8th meeting of the Expert Group on Monitoring and Evaluating the CAP.** Read more >>>

- **HR – 19 November 2015** – Helpdesk capacity building event on the CMES and the evaluation of LEADER/CLLD. Read more >>>

- **BE – 26 November 2015 – EU Rural Networks' Assembly**: The Rural Networks' Assembly discusses the annual work programmes of the two Rural Networks and defines priority themes. The Evaluation Helpdesk's main priorities are the evaluation milestones (AIR 2017, AIR 2019, ex post evaluation) defined in the regulation. Several of the topics discussed by the RN Assembly are important to be further explored from the evaluation side: evaluation of transnational cooperation, and pillar 1 – pillar 2 evaluation. Read more >>>

- **ES – 30 November 2015** – Helpdesk capacity building event on the evaluation of LEADER/CLLD. Read more >>>

December 2015:

- **AT – 3 December 2015 – Sounding Board of the Thematic Working Group Evaluation of National Rural Networks:** Sounding Board members and authors of the guidelines discuss the first draft of the guidelines. Read more >>>

- **CY – 4 December 2015** – Helpdesk capacity building event on the CMES. Read more >>>

- **PL – 7-8 December 2015** – Nordic-Baltic Rural Network Meeting: Helpdesk provides input on evaluation of NRNs. Read more >>>

- **LV – 14 December 2015** – Helpdesk capacity building event on the evaluation of LEADER/CLLD. Read more >>>

2016:

- **LU – January 2016** – Helpdesk capacity building event. Read more >>>
- **UK & IE – 3 February 2016** – Helpdesk capacity building event. Read more >>>
- **IT – 15 February 2016** – Helpdesk capacity building event. Read more >>>
- **NL – 16 February 2016** – Helpdesk capacity building event. Read more >>>
- **DE – 25 February 2016** – Helpdesk capacity building event. Read more >>>
- **FR – March 2016** – Helpdesk capacity building event. Read more >>>
- **DE – To be determined** – Good Practice Workshop on HNV. Read more >>>

The Evaluation Helpdesk works under the supervision of Unit E.4 (Evaluation and studies)
of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development.

The contents of this newsletter do not necessarily express the official views of the European Commission.

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