

## **Proceedings of Seminar – Madrid, 26-27 June**

### **Programming Innovation in Rural Development**

The benefits of closer collaboration between farmers and the scientific community are well understood, but a huge gap exists in most EU Member States between research and farming practice. The aim of the EIP on Agricultural Sustainability and Productivity is to help close this gap by providing an effective working interface between researchers, farmers and other relevant rural stakeholders with a number of specific tools available for facilitating active interaction and the sharing of innovation-relevant knowledge.

Two EU policies are central to implementation of the EIP in the coming years: 2014-2020 Rural Development Policy and EU Research and Innovation Policy ('Horizon2020'). On 26 – 27 June 2013, DG Agriculture and Rural Development invited national / regional Managing Authorities to a technical seminar in Madrid specifically to discuss how to use the measures in the 2014-2020 Rural Development Policy tool-kit most effectively for the programming and implementation of the EIP. The meeting was organised by the EIP AGRI Service Point and was hosted by the Spanish Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Environment.

The seminar had four objectives:

1. To improve understanding of the guidelines and legal provisions for the EIP
2. To help take stock of 'who is where' in EIP programming issues
3. To learn about some models of implementation which could serve as examples for programming
4. To facilitate mutual learning and exchange of ideas between the participants

#### **Guidelines and Legal Provisions**

The EIP is built upon an 'interactive innovation model' which goes far beyond simply speeding-up of the transfer of innovation from the laboratory to the market. The EIP focuses instead upon using bottom-up approaches (including so-called Innovation Brokers) to form partnerships and directly link farmers, researchers, advisors, businesses, and other actors in Operational Groups that implement concrete innovation projects.

Martin Scheele and Inge van Oost from DG Agriculture and Rural Development presented the current 'state of the art' regarding the draft EIP guidelines and legal provisions. Whilst providing detailed insights into the measures available for operationalizing the EIP, they also stressed that these must be applied flexibly and creatively.

"The European Commission is keen not to be prescriptive about innovation", said Mr Scheele, "Innovation depends upon context and we must encourage people to address their specific issues in their specific regional, climatic and structural context. We must therefore

keep the requirements for Operational Groups and innovative actions as simple, clear and verifiable as possible. Overly sophisticated rules for the Operational Groups will strangle innovation and increase the risk of dysfunctional administrative burden.”

Participants were invited to ask questions and clarification was sought on several open issues, notably regarding the scope of actions that can be financed under Article 36 (cooperation measure). These questions and answers will feed into further development of the EIP guidelines which are due for publication soon, but which will remain a living document that continues to evolve.

One interesting question raised was the issue of intellectual property rights and whether beneficiaries of the EIP are obliged to disseminate results when their innovation leads to a clear market advantage. Mr Scheele replied that, “A good deal of the results from activities under the EIP are obtained with public money. Operational Groups shall, therefore, disseminate results and share experience via the EIP network. Programming authorities and stakeholders are urged to contribute to turning dissemination into a fruitful exchange of knowledge and mutual learning.”

### **Programming Issues**

Discussions were greatly enriched by short presentations from representatives from seven Managing Authorities in Spain, Slovenia, Italy, Estonia, Sweden, Flanders (Belgium) and the Netherlands. These gave a quick snapshot of the current state-of-play with the EIP at Member State and regional level, and it is apparent that a variety of different ideas / approaches are emerging. The EIP will clearly be characterised by a great diversity of implementation that mirrors the diversity of the Member States and regions.

Nonetheless, there are also some common issues and patterns that are evident. It is, for example, proving challenging for many Managing Authorities to translate the EIP concept into the “language” of their 2014-2020 rural development programmes. There are tensions between flexibility in the pursuit of innovation and the rigid administrative requirements of the EAFRD (objectivity, verifiability, traceability, rationalisation of administrative procedures etc.). Operationalising the EIP in large Member States with many regional rural development programmes (e.g. Italy) is more complex than in small Member States with a single national programme (e.g. Estonia). But there are already foundations for the EIP in place - it is good to build upon existing experiences (e.g. measure 124 in the Netherlands) and to utilise existing structures (e.g. the national rural network in Sweden), especially where these have already delivered good results.

### **Implementation Models**

Many examples of innovation brokerage and Operational Group-type structures already exist and the lessons learnt from existing experiences of supporting innovation with rural

development funding (2007-2013) were presented based upon case studies collected by the ENRD Focus Group on Knowledge Transfer and Innovation (KT&I).

The KT&I Focus Group of the ENRD Co-ordination Committee identified a total of 10 existing groups that are very close in structure and function to future Operational Groups, and a further 19 existing which provide useful information and insights. From these 29 groups, 11 were funded under measure 124 (cooperation for the development of new products, processes and technologies). A number of clear lessons emerge from the existing groups, including the benefits of building strong and diverse partnerships; encouraging trans-national / inter-territorial cooperation, and; maintaining a focus upon the sustainability of the innovative action after RDP funding ceases.

The KT&I Focus Group also collected 17 examples of existing innovation brokerage from 8 Member States involving a range of actors (e.g. research institutes, private consultancies, farmers' union, advisory services etc.) and utilising a variety of different funding sources. The lessons learnt from these existing are very valuable and are already reflected in the EIP guidelines. For example, as Inge Van Oost from DG Agriculture and Rural Development explained, "We clearly understand from the findings of the KT&I Focus Group that effective innovation brokerage in agriculture is often linked to a good knowledge of the sector and a close connection and interaction with farmers and other agricultural services. We also understand that the accreditation of innovation brokers may be too rigid."

### **Mutual Learning and Exchange of Ideas**

During the second day of the seminar the Managing Authorities worked in smaller groups to share their experiences and ideas directly regarding three key practical issues - how to build the "architecture" of the EIP; how to get stakeholders interested and involved in the EIP, and; how to set-up Operational Groups. A participatory discussion technique was used with the outcomes of all discussions 'harvested' and reported back to the closing session of the seminar. These outcomes will be reported separately and will also feed into the revision of the draft EIP guidelines.

Koen Desimpelaere, Team Leader of the EIP AGRI Service Point said, "It was essential to organise this seminar for creating a good understanding of the EIP as the basis for programming of the RDPs. We are confident that the seminar was a great success and that participants left with a more complete and shared vision of the scope and huge potential of the EIP. The EIP AGRI Service Point team looks forward to future events with the Managing Authorities and those stakeholders actively involved in the EIP".