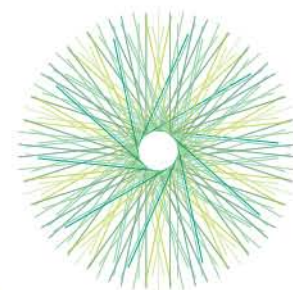


EIP-AGRI News Story

Ljubljana Workshop

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The second DG Agriculture and Rural Development workshop on “Establishing Operational Groups under Rural Development Programmes (RDPs)” took place in Ljubljana, Slovenia, on 25-26 March, 2014 and was kindly hosted by the Slovenian Ministry of Agriculture and Environment and supported by the Chamber of Agriculture and Forestry of Slovenia.

With the programming of RDPs drawing to a conclusion in many Member States, a total of 75 participants from Slovenia, Austria, Croatia, Germany and Hungary joined the workshop to discuss the next steps for putting the European Innovation Partnership on Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability (EIP-AGRI) into practice.

Following an introductory presentation by [DG Agriculture and Rural Development](#), Tanja Gorišek from the [Slovenian Ministry of Agriculture and Environment](#) presented the state of play with EIP-AGRI programming in Slovenia. *“Innovation and knowledge transfer are proposed as central elements of the Slovenian RDP 2014-2020”, explained Ms. Gorišek, “and we expect the EIP-AGRI to help address the key challenges identified in the SWOT and Needs Assessment of the RDP. Possible key themes for Operational Groups therefore include the contribution of technological developments in agriculture to improving soil and water quality; protecting biodiversity, and; developing climate change resilience / adaptation”.*

Tanja Gorišek continued her presentation with a detailed insight into how the Slovenian Ministry of Agriculture and Environment proposes to launch the first Operational Groups, and concluded with a series of open questions that provoked comment and further discussion amongst the participants.

Four contrasting case studies then followed, each presenting the practical experiences and lessons learnt from existing examples of both bringing partners together with the help of Innovation Support Service providers and the implementation of innovative projects involving various stakeholders.

There are numerous forms of innovation support service and examples of a public institution and a private company were presented. Betka Logar from the [Agricultural Institute of Slovenia](#) outlined the approach of the University's Animal Science Department to linking different partners to develop a number of web-based management tools for dairy cattle in response to specific requests received from farmers. Whilst Anita Beblek from [agrathaer](#), a German commercial company with strong research links, described the clear need to bridge the gap between research and practical farm management and how important it is to offer a comprehensive innovation support service with a multi-disciplinary team.

One clear lesson learnt from both examples is that farmers are highly motivated to engage in an innovation process if there are clear and tangible benefits for them. As Betka Logar from the Agricultural Institute concluded, *“We have an existing portfolio of successful web-based applications that are used by many farmers for improving the management of their dairy herds. We are therefore now well-placed to animate and support the development of Operational Groups that match the needs of farmers and the dairy industry with our capacity for research and development”.*

The examples of Innovation Support Service Providers were followed by two presentations of innovative projects that future Operational Groups might engage with. The first project came from Austria and was aimed at improving organic plum production in Styria. As Claudia Freiding from the [Chamber of Agriculture and Forestry of Styria](#) explained, *“The seeds of this project were planted in 2008 with a plum grower in Styria converting to organic production and wondering why there were not more regionally-grown organic plums on the market”*. In 2010, the grower joined with three other local growers plus three education / research centres, a fruit selling business, a plant protection company and the Chamber of Agriculture and Forestry to explore how to improve organic plum production in Styria. The project was led by the first grower and undertook a process of literature review, farm surveys, pest monitoring and field trials. According to Ms. Freiding, *“Whilst the results were not 100% conclusive it was an excellent example of farmer-led research and yielded many useful lessons for the management of future projects”*.

Janko Rode from the [Chamber of Agriculture and Forestry of Slovenia](#) then presented a comprehensive list of recommendations based upon the experiences of his colleagues implementing a joint project regarding the management of contaminated agricultural land in the Upper Mežiška valley. The project involved a partnership between farmers in the heavily polluted former mining area, the regional Chamber of Agriculture and Forestry, the Institute for Environmental Research and the Institute of Public Health. As Mr Rode explained, *“Projects with many partners must have clear co-ordination, equality between partners and transparent financial management. Agricultural advisers can be good co-ordinators since they are usually well-known by all partners and trusted by farmers. Trust and goodwill between partners is essential for easy project implementation and successful results”*.

Following the case study presentations, in-depth, country-specific discussions were kicked-off to allow participants to dig more deeply into the grass-roots issues observed and / or experienced with setting-up Operational Groups in their own specific national or regional context.

According to Rob Peters from the European Commission, *“All participants were representatives of active stakeholder organisations in the EIP-AGRI and were specifically invited as potential ‘EIP multipliers’ that could take home, disseminate and apply the knowledge, experience and ideas shared in the workshop. We heard some great practical examples to draw inspiration from and we are confident that participants left the workshop with enthusiasm and new ideas”*.

All presentations and other information from the Ljubljana workshop are available [here](#).