



Subgroup on LEADER and territorial development

3rd meeting - 5-6 March 2025

Day 1 (5 March 2025)

Welcome and introduction by the Chair (DG AGRI)

The Chair (**Hugo Almeida, Deputy Head of Unit D1, DG AGRI**) welcomed members of the Subgroup on LEADER and territorial development (SoLTD), emphasising the importance of this moment in time, after the introduction of The Vision for agriculture and food and the launch of the consultations on the next Multi-annual Financial Framework (MFF). In terms of the Vision, the whole food value chain is crucial, while strengthening rural areas through LEADER, Smart Villages, and rural proofing remain key elements. The MFF framework is set to be published in June 2025 and all relevant stakeholders were called upon to participate in the consultation. The agenda of the SoLTD reflects these important milestones, with discussions on relevant contributions of LEADER, reflections on its implementation, and the future of rural development. This Subgroup meeting was held over two half-days – a new format upon which members were invited to provide feedback.

Short policy framing (DG AGRI, Unit B3)

Maria Gomez-Zamalloa Gafo (Acting Head of Unit B3, DG AGRI) delivered important policy-framing messages relating to LEADER, starting with reaffirming LEADER's important role in rural development. While the implementation of LEADER under the 2014-2022 Rural Development Programme (RDP) is ongoing, LAGs have been selected in almost all Member States (MSs) and are fully operational, launching calls for projects in several MSs under the CAP Strategic Plans (CSPs). MAs are updating their CSPs to include result indicators relating to the selected LEADER local development strategies. In most MSs, LAGs will also have a central role in animating and supporting Smart Village strategies and projects. Monitoring data indicates that there are more than 120,000 LAG members across rural Europe, representing a strong network, however, the participation of youth and women in decision-making can be further strengthened. Simplification, particularly for smaller projects, more use of simplified cost options, and delivering on and demonstrating LEADER's added value should be further moved forward. For the future, LEADER's role will increase in addressing new areas such as communication, social resilience, security, and countering disinformation. The outcome of MFF is unknown but the Vision for Agriculture plans the reinforcement of LEADER/Smart Village approaches.

Policy updates (DG AGRI)

The introductory interventions were followed by three presentations from DG AGRI covering policy updates.

Introducing his presentation on the [Vision for Agriculture and Food](#), **Fabio Cossu (Unit A.1, DG AGRI)** noted the Vision is to be considered a roadmap for policy action, based on the recognition of the strategic role of the agri-food sector, building on four key areas of intervention to shape an attractive, competitive, future-proof, and fair food system in the EU. Research, innovation, knowledge, skills and digitalisation were also identified as contributing to an enabling environment. In rural areas, key challenges identified relate to abandonment of rural areas and limited access to essential services. Relevant areas of rural development identified in the Vision include strengthening LEADER/CLLD and Smart Villages, operationalising the rural proofing principles, further developing the concept of functional rural areas, and updating the Rural Action Plan and the Rural Pact. Addressing disinformation in rural areas and establishing a 'women in farming' platform are other foreseen initiatives. **Mr Cossu** emphasised that putting the key areas of action into practice was a collective effort, and members of the Subgroup were called upon to contribute and continue working together in this respect. The Conference on the Vision for Agriculture and Food (on 8 May 2025, in Brussels) will provide an opportunity for continuing the dialogue.

Iwona Lisztwan (Unit B.3, Social sustainability, DG AGRI) gave a presentation on the implementation of LEADER in Rural Development Programmes, LEADER in the CAP Strategic Plans (CSPs), and the changing policy context for LEADER under the New Commission. Concerning LEADER in the RDPs, the average LEADER expenditure in MAs is 80% (with some MAs lagging). Through the implementation of 2 728 LAG strategies, LEADER created 72 000 jobs and improved rural services for 31% of the rural population in the EU.





Regarding LEADER implementation under the CAP Strategic Plans in some MSs, the selection and full functioning of LAGs has still not been achieved. An overview of LEADER in the CSPs was provided based on responses from 15 MAs to a LEADER implementation survey. A more detailed analysis is foreseen based on the annual reports from MSs at the end of 2024. Regarding the delays, the regulatory provision on LAGs being able to fulfil their tasks one year after the approval of CSPs was emphasised.

Simplified Cost Options (SCOs) are used in most MSs, in some cases complemented with other simplifications related to advance payments, procedures, and other flexibilities. Some obstacles to simplification persist, including smaller projects, limited deeper understanding of the bottom-up approach, irregularities, audit requirements, and the cost of animation in the local area. The European Commission's simplification package will address obstacles related to small projects with provisions and guidelines.

In terms of result indicators for LEADER, most MSs' choices are linked to CAP General Objective 3 (GO3 with indicators related to jobs, rural businesses, social inclusion, and smart villages), with a smaller number of MSs selecting result indicators linked to GO2 (climate and environment) and GO1 (competitiveness of the agri-food supply chain).

About 2 000 LAGs (out of a total of more than 2 600 LAGs planned) provided monitoring data indicating that these LAGs have about 120 000 members, with 29 000 directly involved in LAG decision-making – a strong basis for delivering LEADER added value and valorising LEADER networking and participative local democracy. The evidence shows that there is scope for further improvement in women and youth participation in LEADER (40% average for women, 9% average for youth).

Regarding the new policy context for LEADER, this features the Vision for Agriculture and Food, a new emphasis on competitiveness (based on [the Draghi report](#)), emerging priority issues areas linked to security, resilience, simplification, and disinformation. The consultation on the new MFF is an important part of this changing landscape, and Subgroup members and their networks are called upon to have their say until 6 May 2025, when the [public consultation](#) will close.

In her presentation on Smart Villages (SV) and LEADER, **Maria-Christina Makrandreou (Unit B.3, DG AGRI)** called the attention of members of the Subgroup to the fact that in most CSPs the Smart Villages concept is implemented through LEADER, with only 5 CSPs (Austria, Finland, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania) including interventions dedicated to SV. National Networks contributed to preparing rural territories for SV in most MSs. Under the CSPs, the implementation of as many as 2 600 SV strategies or projects is envisaged. The importance of support to rural communities for implementing SV from LAGs, National Networks, and municipalities was emphasised. In this context, the important contribution of the Smart Rural 27 project was cited, and Subgroup members were invited to read the [Smart Rural 27 final report](#), which includes useful recommendations concerning SV implementation.

Q&A

During the Q&A, Subgroup members asked presenters about various aspects of implementing LEADER under the CSPs, and the new policy context. Questions related to the financing rules (N+2 rule) and the potential of automatic decommitments by the European Commission, and the relationship between the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas and the Vision for Agriculture and Food. Subgroup members commented on the future of funding specifically for rural development and LEADER stressing the importance of a multi-sectoral view of rural development and keeping LEADER within the CAP with a ring-fenced minimum budget. Regarding the implementation of SV, Subgroup representatives commented on the need for more clarity and continued support.

In response to these comments and questions, DG AGRI representatives clarified that the N+2 rule refers to the level of CSPs, and does not need to be applied to the level of individual projects/intervention funded from the CSP interventions.

In this context, the relevance of the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA) was also reinforced, and the existence of synergies between the LTVRA and the Vision for Agriculture and Food confirmed in the form of the Rural Pact and the Rural Action Plan.

It was also stated that the consultation on the MFF had just been launched, and Subgroup members were encouraged to have their say in the process. As outlined in the Vision for Agriculture and Food, LEADER and SV will be strengthened, and the LEADER method, along with (the 5%) ring-fencing for LEADER, were confirmed as important elements of a stable framework for rural development.



Update on EU CAP Network support activities

Peter Toth and Susan Grieve (EU CAP Network) provided an update on the EU CAP Network support activities to LEADER. Informal meetings with MS and MA colleagues responsible for LEADER continue, and the EU CAP Network will participate in relevant LEADER events, as well as support LINC2025, the annual gathering of LEADER LAGs. There are 1 742 LAGS from 22 MSs in the LAG Directory, with LAG basic data still expected from 5 MSs. New functions developed within the [LAG Directory](#) will help LAGs provide more information to potential partners on their strategies and territories and help them find partners for cooperation. The collection of information relating to transnational cooperation (TNC) procedures and eligibility criteria in MSs has started, and 13 [TNC fact sheets](#) have been published, with more under preparation. A [practical guide to TNC](#) has been prepared and published. All these and new tools under development will be available on the EU CAP Network's [LEADER Transnational Cooperation \(TNC\) page](#). In connection with the new LAG Directory tools, the EU CAP Network will contact LAGs with guidance on how to log in to their profiles and how to use the new tools to enrich their LAG profiles with complementary information.



Q&A

Subgroup members asked about indicating the location of LAGs on a LAG map or publishing the individual MS LAG maps that most MSs have available. The EU CAP Network was asked to clarify how National Networks (NNs) could help with reaching out to LAGs when the new functions are launched.

EU CAP Network representatives explained that the testing of the new functions had been scheduled with one LAG, and the relevant guidance would be prepared based on the lessons learned during this test. LAGs will subsequently be contacted in the coming weeks. National Networks and MAs will also be informed. The EU CAP Network will also explore how the LAG map can be progressed.

Regarding the future of rural development and questions on how the LEADER/CLLD community of practitioners, including Subgroup members, can cooperate and enhance the discussion on CLLD at MS and EU levels, DG AGRI representatives explained that the current policy process had begun, and relevant stakeholders could participate in the consultation process. It was acknowledged that multi-funding might not necessarily be the solution in all MS contexts. The LEADER method and its added value were underlined as essential elements of the policy.

Making LEADER younger, smarter, simpler

This session featured short reports on specific LEADER activities from MSs, and an awareness-raising presentation from the European Digital Media Observatory on disinformation.

Piotr Styczeń (coordinator of the ELARD's Young LEADER Community, Poland) spoke about ELARD's Young LEADER Community. The purpose of the Community, currently comprising 174 members, is to amplify young people's voices in rural development. Notable activities completed include a survey of members that identified three high priority issues for members: youth and leadership in rural areas, access to funding for rural projects by young people, and effectively communicating with and engaging with rural communities from a youth perspective. **Mr Styczeń** also explained his personal involvement in a LAG and in working on its communications strategy, including the combined use of social media reaching more than 11 000 people, face to face meetings, and online surveys.

Paolo Cesarini (Chair, European Digital Media Observatory (European Digital Media Observatory EDMO - United against disinformation)) delivered a presentation on the disinformation of EU society. Disinformation was defined as a combination of falsity and an intentionality to cause public harm while securing economic or political gains. Examples of disinformation targeting EU agricultural policy were presented; for example, the inaccurate story that spread in digital media during the Spanish Parliamentary elections of 2023 about Spain abolishing agriculture due to climate protection reasons. Countering disinformation was presented as a complex process that required a multidimensional, 'whole-of-society' approach, with important elements including the [European Media Freedom Act](#) (with new rules fully applicable from August 2025), the code of conduct on disinformation, support to fact-checking and research, media literacy, training and outreach. The role of SoLTD members' networks in identifying disinformation and 'harmful' stories was also mentioned.

The session continued with '**flash updates**' on LEADER activities in **Italy, Austria, Lithuania, Belgium (Flanders), and Finland**.

Roberta Ciaravino (CREA, Italy) talked about the Italian approach to making LEADER younger and smarter. To address insufficient youth involvement, the 'Youth LEADER Forum' (a free training initiative to involve young people in local development projects) was set up. The 'Smart Rural Lab' enables cooperation on human capital and is based on the recognition that the key to attracting youth to LEADER is making it simpler and smarter. A Smart Village methodological guide was also developed.





Christa Rockenbauer-Peirl (Austria, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Regions and Water Management) explained that the implementation of SV in Austria is similar to LEADER, but on a smaller scale. SV is an essential part of 25 LDSs. The Austrian CSP offers additional resources for smarter rural development, including the intervention “rural innovation systems” complementing LEADER, and the “Region on board” – a university course for employees of regional development organizations. The “My Region – Our Way” strategy complements these, and an SV challenge is planned for 2026. These are complemented with budgets for small projects, strengthening village and town centres. The Austrian National Network (NN) also researched and identified specific factors that enable long-term project impacts.

Virginija Liukpetrytė (Lithuania, Department of EU Affairs and Support Policy Programs) described the thematic approach to local development strategies (LDS) used by 41 out of a total of 49 LAGs in Lithuania. As the average LDS budget in Lithuania is relatively limited (a total of EUR 76m for 49 LAGs in the 2023-2027 programming period), focusing on a small number of key issues was necessary, and LAGs focus their strategies on a number of key local issues, including social and public services, bioeconomy, and climate issues. In Lithuania, LEADER pioneered the method of supporting social enterprises to the extent that the national framework for financing social enterprises had been developed based on LEADER experience.

Wouter Peeters (Belgium, Flanders, Managing Authority) explained the microprojects approach to LEADER simplification in Flanders. These projects can have a maximum total cost of EUR 12 000 (with 65% public funding) and a maximum duration of 18 months. They are funded without proof of expenditure, but funding is paid out only if full proof of realisation is provided. The principle applied is “no proof of realisation = no payment”, but a draft budget for the project is a prerequisite for its selection. These conditions are complemented with an option for fast-track project selection offered to LAGs, with no obligation to involve the full decision-making body in the selection of microprojects (a smaller number of board members appointed by the LAG is accepted).

As **Laura Jänis (Finland, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry)** explained, LEADER in Finland is single-fund EAFRD, with an average of EUR 4.3m budget per LAG. In addition to the extensive use of simplified cost options (SCOs), the Finnish system introduced e-templates to enable standardised monitoring reports in the IT system, a template for the LAG Boards’ self-evaluation, and an automatic and simplified LAG customer survey. In terms of communication, a social media campaign “We too are EU decision makers!” featuring LAG managers and board members has been introduced to commemorate Europe Day (9 May) each year.

Other updates on LEADER-related activities

Eduardo Serrano (AGRI A3) spoke about the DG AGRI Evaluation of the impact of LEADER towards the general objective “Balanced Territorial Development”. This challenging evaluation process was launched in 2020. Two important milestones relate to the findings of and follow up to the special report of the European Court of Auditors, and the presentation of the findings to the **Regulatory Scrutiny Board** (RSB) in 2023. This evaluation was distinct in its approach – instead of the intervention logic of individual LAG strategies, its focus was the LEADER method in terms of social capital, local governance, and better results from projects. The evaluation found that LEADER’s main scope can be linked to the “small and local”, its main effectiveness being in addressing socio-economic issues, but with potential in addressing environmental issues as cross-cutting. More support for cooperation and innovation were emphasised, as well as further improvements needed for governance and participation. An important lesson learned from the evaluation was that animation should not be considered as a cost, rather as investment in local human capital, in people; however, distinguishing activities related to animation and running a LAG remain a challenge. It was also noted that larger LAGs had proportionally lower running costs compared to smaller LAGs. The evaluation has also found that more multi-level coordination in the LEADER delivery chain resulted in more efficiency. The need for further simplification and increasing and simplifying CLLD multi-funding was also noted. Based on feedback from the RSB underlining the need for more quantified monitoring data and a common intervention logic based on the LEADER added value concept, the data requirements laid down in the implementing regulation (EU) 2022/1475 were developed.

Q&A

Subgroup members commented on various aspects described in the presentation. Regarding LEADER’s impact, distinguishing it from the impacts of other policies on a specific local area is a challenge that the University of Dijon is working on, as **Hanane Allali Puz (Ministry of Agriculture and Food Sovereignty, France)** explained. On LEADER’s contribution to specific aspects of local development, **Alexandra de Haas (LEADER Aaland, Finland)** noted that several projects on addressing nutrient leakage and protecting vulnerable areas in Aaland are implemented through LEADER with considerable volunteer engagement. In relation to running costs and animation, **Maria Jose Murciano (REDR, Spain)** asked why, if running costs are to be considered an investment in people, they are paid only on the basis of projects completed, while **Laura Jänis (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Finland)** emphasised a requirement for clear separation of activities and costs related to running the LAG and to animation would only create further administrative burden. According to **Luis Chaves (Minha Terra, Portugal)** “jobs created” was clearly not sufficient as an indicator, while **Piotr Sadlocha (ELARD)** noted that more than 20 000 jobs had been created with LEADER in Poland in the previous programming period and asked about the number of jobs created through the Cohesion Fund (for comparison).

In response to the comments and questions, **DG AGRI** representatives noted that while distinguishing outputs and results was a relatively simple exercise, the same exercise relating to impacts of various policies was more challenging; however, some comparisons exist, e.g. relating to entrepreneurship support with or without LEADER.

It was confirmed that running costs of LAGs needed to be calculated based on the 25% maximum threshold in the Regulation, with cost incurred for the strategy as a basis. Despite the difficulty of separating animation and running costs, it is essential to demonstrate the added value of both activities. Assessment of the added value of LEADER will be done in some MSs by the MAs, while, in others, LAGs are trained in methods for doing this.

Introduction to Day 2 and closing the meeting

Hugo Almeida (Deputy Head of Unit D.1, DG AGRI) thanked participants for the fruitful and rich discussion, reminded them of the main agenda points for Day 2, and encouraged them to continue networking informally.



Day 2 (6 March 2025)

Introduction to Day 2 (DG AGRI)

Antonia Gamez Moreno (Head of Unit D.1, DG AGRI) opened Day 2 of the meeting, welcomed Subgroup members, and reminded them of the more participative nature of the proceedings of the day, with a panel discussion followed by an interactive session about the EU CAP Network's annual workplan.

Reflections on LEADER implementation, EU policy initiatives, and the future of rural development - panel discussion

Following the introduction to Day 2 by the Chair, **David Lamb (EU CAP Network)** introduced the members of the panel, **Maria Gomez-Zamalloa Gafo** (Acting Head of Unit B.3, DG AGRI), **Kristiina Tammets** (Estonian LEADER Union, Estonia), **Francoise Bonert** (Ministry of Agriculture, Viticulture and Rural Development, Luxembourg), **Patricia Martinez Alonso** (Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Spain), and **Piotr Styczeń** (ELARD, Young LEADER Community coordinator). The panel aimed to answer three questions relating to how LEADER can be reinforced, simplified, and made to fit into the rural development policy content and global challenges now and in the future.

On **reinforcing LEADER**, **Piotr Styczeń** explained that the presence of young people in LAGs and their decision-making bodies will attract more young people and encourage them to participate more. **Patricia Martinez Alonso** added that improving communication about LEADER and LAGs, the representation of youth and women in LAGs, and increasing LAG resources for animation were essential for strengthening LEADER. **Maria Gafo (DG AGRI)** stressed the need for more participation by youth and women, and for more political recognition for LEADER and SV.

She added that negotiations on the future of MFF are key, and in this context communicating the added value of LEADER is essential. **Francoise Bonert** referred to the beginnings of the LEADER method when it used to be similar to a rural 'think-tank', working in a very innovative and bottom-up way. Doing this would require more investment in people and relatively less in infrastructure. Keeping the minimum of 5% allocation from EAFRD to LEADER and more involvement of young people were also mentioned as important elements that could be complemented by building a new relationship with agriculture, e.g., with focus on supporting generational renewal. **Kristiina Tammets** highlighted the need to keep the LEADER methodology intact, stressing that the seven principles only work together, and when public, civil, and private sectors cooperate. She referred to the 120 000 LAG members across Europe and added that the members' networks increase the number of organisations and people involved with LEADER even further. She provided the example of her LAG Tartu County Development Association having 78 members, but engaging with nearly 500 different organisations, strengthening the EU principle "bringing Europe closer to citizens". Strengthening innovation was mentioned as another way to reinforce LEADER which could be done through LAG linkages with SV, HORIZON, and INTERREG.



Regarding the **simplification of LEADER**, all members of the panel agreed on the importance of SCOs, highlighting various aspects of this. **Maria Gafo** referred to the flexibility allowed by the current regulatory framework regarding MS decisions on how to implement SCOs. The need to demonstrate and share good MS practices in this regard was stressed. It was also mentioned that making the use of SCOs mandatory was under consideration. **Kristiina Tammets** noted that interpretations of rules relevant to SCOs may differ even between Managing Authorities (MA) and Paying Agencies (PA). In most contexts, the use of the lump sum can be a simplification, but the simplification of other procedures or even the use of public procurement can constitute simplification, depending on the specific context. The simplifications introduced to TNC in Estonia, a result of cooperation between LAGs, MA, and PA, was mentioned as a positive example. **Ms Tammets** also encouraged the LEADER community to talk more about good examples. According to **Francoise Bonert**, work needs to continue on SCOs, also in terms of knowledge exchange between MSs. MAs need to incentivise the use of SCOs, inform stakeholders about potential bottlenecks, and avoid adding rules at MS level if these are not required by the EU regulation, e.g., if MS-level calls for TNC projects are not required by the EU regulation. Looking to the future, it was added that considering the 25% threshold on running cost and animation at the level of the MS instead of at the level of each LAG would help smaller LAGs. Simplification can also be achieved by working with and listening to LAGs and not making EU rules more complicated at the MS level.

Patricia Martinez Alonso referred to two main demands from beneficiaries, relating to the reduction of bureaucracy and making some form of advance payments accessible. On the use of SCOs, knowledge exchange between MAs is essential. Spain is going to improve access to funds by combining grants and financial instruments, thereby offering better than market conditions of funding for beneficiaries (e.g., with the use of the interest rate subsidy). **Piotr Styczeń** added that simplified procedures for small grants would simplify LEADER for youth, which would in turn lead to more young people in LEADER.

Regarding **LEADER's fit within the policy context** and current and future challenges, members of the panel agreed that the strength of LEADER was in the LEADER method. In addition to this, **Maria Gafo** emphasised the need for focusing on specific priority themes based on local needs, adding that some themes, such as support to small businesses, tourism, environment, rural services or disinformation, may be relevant for most LAGs. **Kristiina Tammets** underlined that the LEADER method could be used for any rural development activity, and even for broader regional development, e.g., in Estonia, LAGs also implement urban social fund and social projects, and Estonian LAGs have the capacity to take more topics on board, such as security, energy communities, etc. The potential of multi-funding was mentioned for providing support to the full range of local development needs. The capacity of LAGs to involve local people and build local networks is crucial, as well as unique. **Francoise Bonert** emphasised LEADER's role in supporting new ideas, investing in people, and being an "incubator" for rural innovation that covers themes ranging from agriculture to culture and is able to address changing needs in a changing world (e.g., during COVID LAGs found new solutions to manage the crisis). Talking about the Spanish context, **Patricia Martinez Alonso** referred to LAGs' successful approaches to addressing key challenges in Spain, including rural depopulation, with improving the access to quality jobs and services in rural areas. She also mentioned that LAGs are the bridge between rural society and central administration.

Q&A

Subgroup members commented on changing the mindset from defining a long list of eligible costs to defining a shorter list of ineligible costs or using the lump sum option more for simplification, and the possible role of AI in simplification. The importance of knowledge exchange between MSs was also emphasised. Members of the panel confirmed the use of lump sum in Spain, Luxembourg and Estonia. The Tartu County Development Association confirmed the use of AI to support their communication activities.

Further reflections from Subgroup members, from several MAs (Aaland-Finland, Germany, Portugal, Estonia, the Netherlands), enriched the discussion on simplification and SCOs. An important challenge in applying SCOs is linked to heavy emphasis on controls versus an emphasis on decision-making. Fear of audit and auditors, as well as of potential errors in the calculation method of an SCO that will in turn affect all projects paid based on that method, could be key factors preventing the broader use of SCOs in MSs. More cooperation with MAs and PAs, as well as clear communication from the Commission about SCOs, are key in addressing these issues. The use of SCOs is more prevalent in relation to staff costs, with examples about using SCOs for projects more limited in number – more

knowledge exchange is needed in this respect. LAG running costs should be accepted as 'investment' in people that support practising local democracy in rural areas – essentially, this is what LAGs are doing. The discussion about making LEADER more fit for the future should not be limited to simplification and SCOs, but also focus on strategic aspects and LDSs. To achieve this and strengthen the transformative role of LAGs in local development, LEADER's added value needs to be better demonstrated. Ring-fencing resources for LEADER was emphasised as a key element, with local communities making decisions about the priorities to use these resources for.

In her response to these reflections, **Maria Gafo (DG AGRI)** referred to the relative flexibility of EU rules made more complex by "gold-plating" (adding further layers of rules) at MS level. In this context, the EC's new simplification package – not limited to LEADER only – will include proposals for simplified audits for small operations up to EUR 50 000. Referring to the ECA special report on LEADER added value, it was underlined that the report had not questioned the actual added value of LEADER, but the way it is demonstrated. **Francoise Bonert** emphasised that building up and maintaining local networks was an ongoing challenge for LAGs, e.g. involving new local politicians after elections or convincing young people to join local networks.

David Lamb concluded this session by thanking members of the panel and the audience for their contributions, and stressed that the EU CAP Network constantly welcomed good practice examples, including about the use of SCOs for projects, to support knowledge exchange among Member States.

Update on the preparation of the 2025/2026 EU CAP Network's Annual Work Programme

Peter Toth (EU CAP Network) introduced the interactive session, explaining that the Subgroup meeting is a stage in the process of developing the 2025/2026 EU CAP Network's Annual Work Programme and an opportunity for Subgroup members to contribute to this process.



Interactive session to identify potential LEADER activities in the 2025/2026 Annual Work Programme of the EU CAP Network

Subgroup members worked in three groups on developing recommendations for the EU CAP Network's 2025/2026 annual work programme in terms of LEADER work, focusing on cross-cutting aspects, TNC, and younger, smarter, and simpler aspects of LEADER implementation. Members of each group had the opportunity to indicate their preferences by voting on the themes and activity strands identified and establish an order of priority for these. The priority themes identified were more information and knowledge exchange about simplification (transnational cooperation, the use of simplified cost options, and multi-funded CLLD), building a community of practice involving Subgroup members, better communication of LEADER at all levels, and more information about 'ring-fenced' youth budgets and communication strategies relating to youth engagement in LEADER.



Summary of interactive session discussions

Simplification featured strongly among the priority themes identified during the interactive session. Key aspects of this theme were linked to simplifying TNC by sharing information about MS practices and the simplification potential of having open TNC calls across the EU. In terms of SCOs sharing information and understanding, relevant success factors linked both to the use of EAFRD and multi-funded CLLD were considered important. Providing access to source materials, various SCO calculation methods was emphasised in this respect. Subgroup members felt that coordination among DGs responsible for EU funds within multi-funded CLLD could be improved.

Several recommendations related to improving communication and knowledge exchange. Focusing on youth, Subgroup members selected as top priorities knowledge exchange on "ring-fenced" youth budgets in LEADER strategies and sharing information on communication strategies, awareness-raising campaigns and other approaches to attract youth into LEADER. Better communication about LEADER at all levels – local, MS, EU – was identified as a key activity strand to ensure better understanding of the added value of the method and contribute to potentially safeguarding funding for LEADER in the future. Subgroup members felt that meeting once a year was not sufficient, and it was recommended to build a community of practice involving them to facilitate further exchanges among LEADER stakeholders representing various organisations (LAGs, NGOs, MAs, NNs). The use of AI was mentioned as a field in which more information was needed.

Summary and end of the meeting

Antonia Gamez Moreno (Head of Unit, D.1, DG AGRI) thanked Subgroup members for their contributions and engagement. **David Lamb (EU CAP Network)** summarised the event, appreciating the active participation of Subgroup members, the many relevant points raised, and the shared interest in communicating the added value of LEADER. He reminded Subgroup members that the LEADER implementation survey would be kept open for those MSs that have not filled it in. The EU CAP Network would also follow up on the idea of the LAG map raised by several participants, and inform MAs and NNs about the next steps related to the LAG Directory and partner search tools. Regarding the consultation on the MFF, Subgroup members were encouraged to involve their networks and participate in the consultation. Relevant links to the specific chapters of the consultation were also shared, along with a reminder about the planned seminar on the future CAP (scheduled for 3 June 2025).

