

# The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development

PROJECT EXAMPLES 2007-2013



Climate action



Cooperation &  
networking



Rural economy



Social inclusion



Young people



Innovation  
support



Communication  
tools



European Network for  
Rural Development

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## European Network for Rural Development

The European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) is the hub that connects rural development stakeholders throughout the European Union (EU). The ENRD contributes to the effective implementation of Member States' Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) by generating and sharing knowledge, as well as through facilitating information exchange and cooperation across rural Europe.

Each Member State has established a National Rural Network (NRN) that brings together the organisations and administrations involved in rural development. At EU level, the ENRD supports the networking of these NRNs, national administrations and European organisations.

<http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/en/en-rd-presentation.cfm>

Find out more on the *ENRD website* (<http://enrd.ec.europa.eu>)

## The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development

The EAFRD Project Examples brochure forms part of a series of ENRD publications that help encourage information exchange. Each edition of the brochure features different types of projects that have received RDP co-finance from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD).

Further editions in the series of this EAFRD Project Examples brochure can be downloaded from the *ENRD website's publications and media section*<sup>1</sup> and the *RDP Projects Database*<sup>2</sup> contains many additional examples of EAFRD assistance to rural development initiatives.

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1 [http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/en-rd-library/eafrd\\_examples\\_of\\_projects\\_brochure\\_en/en/eafrd\\_examples\\_of\\_projects\\_brochure\\_en\\_home.cfm](http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/en-rd-library/eafrd_examples_of_projects_brochure_en/en/eafrd_examples_of_projects_brochure_en_home.cfm)

2 [http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/policy-in-action/rdp\\_view/en/view\\_projects\\_en.cfm](http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/policy-in-action/rdp_view/en/view_projects_en.cfm)

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# Celebrating European success stories in rural development

Since its launch in 2007, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) has provided financial assistance to tens of thousands of different projects throughout rural Europe. It continues to be used by Member States to support a huge number of different types of rural development projects that create a wide variety of benefits and advantages for all EU citizens.

Much of the EAFRD is used to assist rural businesses to improve supplies of healthy, tasty, affordable, and quality food. Our environment also benefits from significant sums of EAFRD support that helps to maintain Europe's countryside as an attractive place to live, work and visit. Jobs remains another high priority for EAFRD projects which have had considerable success in both enhancing the quality of existing employment, as well as creating new jobs for rural areas.

Member States have thus been able to use the EAFRD to achieve smart, sustainable, and inclusive approaches to rural development across Europe. What's more the Fund makes major contributions to other high-impact areas that benefit EU citizens, such as conserving biodiversity and tackling climate challenges.

## Good practices

All EAFRD projects are implemented through the Member States' Rural Development Programmes (RDPs), which have supported many project examples of EAFRD good practices. These projects offer a host of useful and interesting learning opportunities that can be harnessed to help transfer knowledge and replicate benefits between different parts of rural Europe.

The European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) plays an important role in encouraging these knowledge transfer processes as part of its remit to help Member States improve the effectiveness of RDPs.

Getting more and better benefits from RDPs for EU citizens is a core objective for the ENRD. Hence, this special edition of the ENRD's EAFRD Project Examples brochure has been designed to highlight a selection of particularly successful rural development initiatives from the 2007-2013 EAFRD period.

Each project has been carefully chosen for their results and outcomes and together the 14 project examples highlight the EAFRD's ability to help Member States produce a very diverse spectrum of worthwhile rural development benefits.



## Multiple merits

All of the project examples in the brochure have been nominated by National Rural Networks (NRNs), who are also involved in helping the RDPs in their countries' to produce more and better benefits for everyone.

NRNs nominated EAFRD project examples that have a multitude of merits in seven main categories, namely:

- Developing the rural economy;
- Dealing with climate change;
- Making use of innovation;
- Boosting business opportunities and peer-learning through cooperation and networking;
- Improving social conditions for local communities;
- Supporting future generations of rural residents; and
- Using communication tools for developing rural areas.



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More than 160 projects from 14 countries<sup>3</sup> were nominated by NRNs and a special ENRD selection committee was organised to determine the final set of 14 project examples representing 10 EU Member States that are featured in the following pages.

Selection processes concentrated on appraising the results and outputs from individual projects and the selection committee was extremely impressed by the large number of excellent success stories that NRNs identified.

Hence, the project examples in this brochure intend to illustrate a valuable collection of EAFRD success stories that celebrate the EAFRD's achievements during its first period of operations from 2007-2013.

Members of the selection committee wish to express their gratitude to everyone who participated in the nomination process. Special appreciation is extended to the NRNs who took time to provide such high quality nominations so quickly.

We hope this collection of EAFRD projects can be useful for inspiring similar levels of high quality RDP projects for the 2014-2020 period, thereby resulting in even more and even better benefits for EU citizens from the EAFRD.

For further practical examples of the EAFRD in action, see the ENRD's database of RDP projects<sup>4</sup>. This contains 600 interesting case studies from all Member States. The database is able to provide a far wider geographic coverage of project examples than this brochure's articles, which were limited by the nomination process and selection criteria.

*“The ENRD Contact Point was very impressed by the useful and interesting EAFRD projects that were nominated for this brochure by the National Rural Networks. We believe the selection of articles in the brochure demonstrates the breadth and depth of EAFRD projects and the Contact Point looks forward to continue to showcase new examples in the future.”*

**Mike Gregory,**  
Chair of the selection committee

3 Austria, Belgium, Estonia, Lithuania, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, the United Kingdom.

4 [http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/policy-in-action/rdp\\_view/en/view\\_projects\\_en.cfm](http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/policy-in-action/rdp_view/en/view_projects_en.cfm)

# Rural Economy

## Agri-environment payments protect traditional vineyard practices in Greece

**A**gri-environment payments to farmers in the Member States account for a large proportion of the overall EAFRD budget at EU level. These payments are provided to help farmers offset some of the additional costs that are involved in taking care of specific environmental resources.

A very broad range of different agri-environment schemes receives EAFRD co-finance through the RDPs, and these schemes are common for most parts of rural Europe. Their results help to conserve many different types of birds, insects, flowers, trees, amphibians, mammals, and other biodiversity (including rare breeds of farm animals). Agri-environment schemes are also used regularly to protect the quality of our soils, air, water, and landscapes.

Traditional and extensive agricultural methods are often promoted by agri-environment schemes. These techniques tend to have proven track records for being effective in maintaining long-established habitats and supporting the countryside's attractive appearance. They also help to sustain the availability of traditional food, drink, and other rural products.

A typical example of one such agri-environment scheme can be found in Greece on the small Santorini islands of Thira and Thirasia. Here the Greek RDP has been channelling agri-environment funds to assist local vine growers to continue their distinctive and time-honoured viticulture practices based on 'pezoules'.



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### Preserving the pezoules

Pezoules are stony terraces built along cliff tops or in mountainous parts of the Aegean isles. Designed to provide shelter for dry and wind-blown land, the pezoules are extremely useful for maintaining the cultivation of nutrient-depleted slopes. They help to retain rainwater (a frequent scarcity on Santorini) and provide unique landscape features.

Wine growing on pezoules can be a hard and arduous task, which yields relatively low quantities but high quality grapes. In Santorini, the vines have been grown on pezoules for more than 3500 years using a characteristic production method that the agri-environment payments help farmers to preserve.

Unlike conventional vineyards, Santorini vines are grown close to the ground in non-uniform and dispersed patterns. The crops are pruned in a special way that curls them around in basket-shaped rings. Such a system provides an effective survival mechanism for the vines in harsh and dry climatic conditions.

Farmers are eligible to receive €900 per hectare per annum over a five year period from the agri-environment scheme for growing wine in this extensive way. More than 650 hectares of vineyards, and 600 vine-growers, have benefitted from the EAFRD scheme. Outcomes protect the environment and maintain cultural traditions that are still commercially profitable.

Matthaios Dimopoulos from the Union of Santorini Cooperatives and Santo Wines recognises the EAFRD scheme's role in protecting the islands' traditional land use systems, and their associated economic advantages, noting that "Our members pride themselves on the quality of their products and this quality is achieved by maintaining traditional agricultural activity."



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## Management agreements

Prior to receiving payments from the agri-environment scheme all participating growers need to make clear commitments to manage their pezoules and vines in carefully agreed ways.

As with the myriad of other agri-environment schemes operational throughout rural Europe, Santorini farmers sign a 'management agreement' with the RDP authorities, which regulates the type of agricultural activity that is allowed on the land within the scheme (in order to ensure the desired environmental outcomes).

For the pezoules scheme, these controls stipulate that: cultivation and pruning methods must apply traditional techniques; herbicides or fire are not permitted to control weeds; and trees, hedges, walls and field margins must all be conserved. Compliance with these commitments is checked regularly by RDP authorities who are monitoring the scheme's impacts.

To date it can be shown that the EAFRD scheme has made very real and positive contributions to preserve the volcanic island's distinctive agricultural practices, ecosystem, and biodiversity.

Another useful outcome observed from the agri-environment payments is that they help to reduce urbanisation pressures on rural land. Santorini remains one of Europe's most well known tourist destinations and so the pezoules can be threatened by high demands on the islands' limited land space for building new visitors facilities. Providing support through the EAFRD to local farmers thus helps them to refrain from destroying the pezoules and their multifunctional environmental characteristics.

*"Our members pride themselves on the quality of their products and this quality is achieved by maintaining traditional agricultural activity."*

**Matthaios Dimopoulos,  
Union of Santorini Cooperatives**

# Rural Economy

## Diversifying Northern Ireland's rural economy



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Agriculture provides an important source of employment for most rural areas throughout the 28 Member States. As more farms become more modernised they tend to require less labour, and so the EAFRD includes measures that help diversify rural economies in order to create new types of job opportunities in the countryside.

Farm diversification has been shown to be a powerful driver of economic growth<sup>5</sup>, and all parts of rural Europe can make use of support from the EAFRD to increase employment that is not directly related to agriculture.

Trends indicate that diversification is more prevalent in western and northern Europe, but southern and eastern Member States also appreciate the socio-economic benefits from mixed economies in rural regions.

Lessons can be learned from exchanging information between countries about diversification ideas and experiences, as well as how the EAFRD can support such rural development processes.

### Farm diversification

Martin McClean from Northern Ireland's Cookstown district in the United Kingdom is a case in point. EAFRD co-finance helped him to diversify the income base of his family's beef farm, and Mr McClean's experiences personify those of thousands of other EU farmers who now enjoy incomes from different non-farming sources.

5 [http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/analysis/external/employment/full-text\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/analysis/external/employment/full-text_en.pdf)



Many farm diversification projects start off small-scale and are often based on a farmer's personal interests outside of agriculture. This was true for Mr McClean who had a passion for making violins, violas, and cellos.

He first started crafting string instruments when he was 22 years old. Now at 43, Mr McClean is internationally renowned for the high quality of his work and he prides himself on his ability to create high-spec products. "These instruments are not copies, instead each is tonally perfected according to the Cremonese system and artistically interpreted to create an individual instrument, each with its own personality".

"After years of producing 'hit and miss' dimensional copies which sometimes worked reasonably well, I now have the knowledge and ability to reliably and repeatedly create instruments which embody harmony, sonority, strength, sweetness and an extraordinary dynamic range", says Mr McClean.

EAFRD assistance played a key role in the growth of this rural diversification success story through funding to help develop new business facilities and enhance his business skills.

## Business growth

In order to keep up with demand, and provide him with more scope for expansion, Mr McClean needed to upgrade his instrument workshop. At the same time, he was keen to attract more clients by targeting high calibre musicians. His aim was to grow his craft business in a controlled way that would still be flexible enough to permit him to carry on farming.

Support from the RDP helped him to achieve his aims by converting one of the farm buildings into a modernised workshop facility. Further EAFRD support was provided to help Mr McClean



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undertake training in business planning, taxation, budgeting, and marketing techniques. A detailed marketing strategy was also prepared for the diversification project.

Expert business advisors provided valuable inputs into the marketing strategy, which greatly increased Mr McClean's understanding of the potential range of customers for his instruments. It also presented him with plans for targeting different market segments. Such business development tools remain highly useful for any farm diversification project.

## Promising outlook

Future prospects for this farm diversification project look promising. Success is indicated by continued demand and increased turnover, as well as the fact that the niche business has improved its sales during times of severe economic downturn elsewhere in the Cookstown rural economy.

Mr McClean's on-going plans for the business remain focused on keeping abreast of his client base's interests, particularly those musicians with a very high profile who can help promote the quality of his craftsmanship.

Speaking about the success of Mr McClean's diversification venture, Drew Robinson from Cookstown District Council said, "Martin's support from the Northern Ireland RDP and Local Action Group in his area, South West Action for Rural Development (SWARD), has helped him to strengthen his violin business. He still remains an active farmer and his diversification project has been very effective at giving him 'more than one string to his bow' - as we would say here."

*"I now have the knowledge and ability to reliably and repeatedly create instruments which embody harmony, sonority, strength, sweetness and an extraordinary dynamic range."*

**Martin McClean,  
EAFRD beneficiary**

# Climate action

## EAFRD project helps Finnish farmers to tackle climate challenges

**T**he EAFRD has a special emphasis on helping rural areas to reduce the potential causes of climate change. It also places a high priority on funding rural development projects that help countryside communities and businesses to adapt to changing climate conditions.

These forms of support from the EAFRD are valuable all across rural Europe where the frequency, and extremity, of shifting weather patterns continues to pose many problems.

Hotter drier conditions in southern Member States are increasing risks of drought, erosion, and fire, which affect not only crops and habitats but also human settlements and residents' incomes. Adverse effects from wetter and stormier weather are also more recurrent in central parts of the continent, whilst warmer seasons further north can alter arctic ecosystems and encourage the migration of new pests or other invasive species.

Member States acknowledge that agriculture can make major contributions to their global 'climate action' targets, and a Finnish EAFRD project has successfully demonstrated how this can happen in practice.

### Information impacts

Titled 'Climate change and countryside', the Finnish initiative used funds from a RDP budget that supports information and communication campaigns for land managers like farmers and foresters.



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It was organised by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry's institute MTT Agrifood Research Finland, and combined a mix of workshops, guidance materials, and networking actions. These sought to make scientific knowledge about climate change more useful for farmers and other rural stakeholders. Special attention was paid to promoting good examples from experienced farmers who described their own practices and experiments.

Farmers, agricultural advisors, academics, and public authorities all participated in a series of some 12 different regional workshop events that were held during the project. Each workshop was attended (voluntarily) by around 30 participants, who were able to learn about ways of addressing potential problems and opportunities related to climate change.

Researchers and decision-makers gained valuable information from these meetings about farmers' perceptions towards climate change. New knowledge was also gained about farmers' information needs and their views on opportunities or barriers for applying measure to mitigate against, and adapt to, climate change.

This useful project outcome is underlined by Ms Riitta Savikko from the MTT Agrifood Research Finland institute. "Our project showed that farmers are keen to gain information especially on how to adapt to climate change and the potential of renewable energy solutions, whereas advisors are more interested in practical means for climate change mitigation. Despite their motivation, farmers see lack of time and low profitability as barriers to thinking about climate and environmental issues".

Agricultural production remained a core topic and point of interest for the workshops. Discussions helped businesses involved in agri-supply chains to recognise the strengths and weaknesses of practical mitigation and adaptation measures. Farmers' knowhow and skills were improved in order to properly equip them with the capacity they need for adapting production systems to new temperatures and precipitation levels. The EAFRD project also raised awareness about evolving climate policies and possible variations in related energy markets.

Ms Sari Himanen from the MTT Agrifood Research Institute tells how, "the project has shared information on methods such as increasing soil carbon, improving resilience towards weather extremes via diversification, farm-scale renewable energy solutions, energy efficiency, nutrient recycling and protein crops. Farmers are encouraged to prepare for climate change as part of their preparations for the future, in order to allow farms to develop from generation to generation and remain resilient under many types of future changes."

## Networking knowledge

An important goal of the project involved establishing and enlarging a network of followers who could contribute to the project's knowledge base and help spread the word to encourage more people to participate.

A website was produced ([www.ilmase.fi](http://www.ilmase.fi)) to host all of the project's free advice and guidance. From November 2011 to December 2013 the webpages had over 37 000 visitors. Popular downloads included the project's theme-specific information sheets and brochures on topics such as 'climate-friendly animal husbandry' and 'farm-scale renewable energy production'.

Networking and dissemination activities also involved the project team producing articles for farmers' professional magazines, and sharing information about climate change at agricultural events.

A network of 500 different stakeholders was established by the end of the EAFRD project. They included farmers, advisors and teachers, rural developers, decision-makers and researchers. Results show that these project participants now have more information and are better able to prepare for climate change.

*"Farmers are encouraged to prepare for climate change as part of their preparations for the future."*

**Sari Himanen,**  
MTT Agrifood Research Institute



# Climate action

## Protecting the planet's peat reserves in Austria



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**C**arbon sequestration (also referred to as carbon fixing) is a term used to describe long-term storage of carbon dioxide and other forms of carbon. Such carbon storage processes occur naturally in the environment through soils, plants, and other living matter. These processes that store carbon can help to defer risks of global warming and changing climate patterns by slowing the accumulation of greenhouse gases.

Peat soils hold the potential to sequester more carbon than many other soil types, and so protecting peat reserves can provide important long-term benefits for EU citizens. Peat soils also possess excellent natural abilities to support a rich mix of the biodiversity species that are protected by EU law. Thus, protecting Europe's peat reserves also helps to provide important long-term habitat benefits for EU wildlife.

EAFRD co-finance can make useful contributions to help protect key environmental resources like peat moors. Results from an Austrian RDP project example at the Doblermoos in Kulm am Zirbitz demonstrate how this has happened on the ground.

### Restoring precious peat

Doblermoos' peat resources date back over 8000 years and cover around 10 hectares of a peat moor, which is estimated to store approximately 100 000 tonnes of carbon (plus hold the potential to fix a further 2.5 tonnes of carbon annually). This extensively managed peat moor habitat is home to a diverse collection of native and migratory wildlife species. It is also valued for its characteristic landscape features.

Despite the moor's environmental attributes, commercial pressures threatened its future. Business opportunities were seen from cutting and extracting the peat for sale as horticultural and/or heating products. However, this would have had negative environmental and social consequences in terms of lost landscape, wildlife, and carbon storage. Concerns were also raised in the local area about adverse impacts on the quiet rural area's quality of life from increased numbers of heavy vehicles.

Led by local mayor Johann Obermayer, the community responded to this threat with a proposal for an EAFRD project to protect and conserve Doblermoos. “We had to react very quickly to present an alternative option that stopped the sale of the moor for peat extraction”, recalls Mayor Obermayer, “I contacted Peter Hochleitner from our regional nature conservation agency and he confirmed the ecological importance of the moor’s habitats. Peter also informed me about the potential for possible measures that could enhance the peat land.”

## Project actions

Peat land habitats rely on wet conditions to maintain their quality, but many European peat moors have been drained over time to provide more productive agricultural areas. As the peat dries, it erodes and loses much of its ability to store carbon, as well as support the same range of biodiversity. Peat land restoration measures tend therefore to focus on carrying out works to restore and maintain optimal water levels.

This was the case in the Doblermoos EAFRD project where RDP funds were used to block and deactivate previous drainage systems that had been introduced in some parts of moor. In addition, the project cleared away areas of planted spruce forest to allow more natural regeneration of habitats for native species, like moor grass meadows. Wetland features including ponds and streams were also improved using the EAFRD co-finance in order to encourage amphibians, insects, and other elements of a typical peat moor ecosystem.

Community participation played a pivotal role in the project actions, because the long-term aim was to use the moor as a recreational, educational, and eco-tourism resource that could provide on-going and sustainable benefits for local residents and businesses.



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The project contributed to this via funding for ‘all abilities’ access to the moor and visitor information facilities. Community members also raised a large amount of finance for the project themselves through ideas like a fundraising campaign called ‘My square metre of bird resting site’.

## Positive outcomes

The project succeeded in preserving the moor’s vital carbon sequestration capacity. What’s more, new nature conservation jobs have been created at the project site, which is regularly used for environmental visits by school pupils, older students, and tourists.

Biodiversity outcomes from the project’s coordinated programme of restoration actions have also been extremely positive. “During the last five years more than 80 species of breeding and migratory birds were recorded at the site”, observes Peter Hochleitner, who goes on to emphasise, “We are particularly pleased with the project’s success for birds like Common snipe, Jack snipe, Eurasian woodcock, and Northern Lapwing which are classified by the EU as needing protection.”

These benefits are now being sustained by agri-environment agreements that pay for continuous extensive grazing on the moor. The livestock act as natural mowers and keep the peat habitat from becoming overgrown.

Overall the project can be seen to be a good example of long-term win-win benefits from the EAFRD for EU citizens and EU wildlife, both of which can be badly affected by climate change.

*“We had to react very quickly to present an alternative option that stopped the sale of the moor for peat extraction.”*

**Johann Obermayer,**  
local mayor

# Innovation support

## Funding innovative environmental management in France

Innovation is a term that can mean many different things to many different people. In rural development, innovation can relate to:

- **Working in new ways:** this might involve rural development approaches that apply new ideas, use new techniques, focus on alternative markets, bring diverse sectors and stakeholders together via new networking methods, support new priority groups, or find new solutions to social, economic and environmental challenges.
- **Developing new products and services:** these often result from testing innovative ways of working and can be created through the application of new or novel techniques, partnerships, technology, processes, research and thinking.
- **Adapting proven approaches to new circumstances:** is also an effective means of creating locally significant innovative rural developments. This form of innovation often arises from knowledge transfer between regions or Member States.

Such diversity of innovative actions is a strength, which the EU's rural development policy recognises and innovation is a 'cross-cutting priority' for the 2014 to 2020 period. This means that all RDPs are able to place special emphasis on funding innovative projects. Environmental and climate action projects are also 'cross-cutting priorities' for the EAFRD.

Considerable scope therefore exists to use the EAFRD for projects that involve innovative approaches to managing environmental issues. An interesting example of this type of project is found in France's Pays d'Armagnac (Midi-Pyrénées region), where new ways of conserving biodiversity and water quality have been tested successfully along rivers, roadsides, and field margins.



© Association Arbres et Paysage 32

### Differentiated management

Environmental authorities from the community of municipalities of Ténarèze and Bas-Armagnac identified a need to address high nitrate levels in water, and intensive soil use by agriculture. Both of these issues were having a negative impact on local biodiversity.

As part of their strategy to help halt biodiversity decline, the authorities wanted to introduce new forms of pro-active environmental management. Their plan included piloting new ways of working by adapting and applying novel techniques that had been proven in other French areas. These innovations centred on making use of 'differentiated management' techniques to foster 'spontaneous vegetation' that could act as a wildlife habitat, and also a buffer zone to protect natural resources.

Hélène Volebele from the 'Arbres et paysages 32' environmental organisation helped to coordinate this EAFRD project and she explains the techniques that were used. "Differentiated management is a carefully planned environmental management

method that takes account of natural and human constraints for each individual situation where it is used. It aims to identify cost-effective approaches that require less maintenance but still produce the desired results in reliable and durable ways.”

Such results are achieved by using a purposely chosen mix of plant species that can spontaneously create controlled areas of low maintenance, low risk, and high nature value vegetation. These act as ‘ecological corridors’ that provide shelter for insects, animals, and birds to move about within. They also provide ‘habitat stepping stones’ that can link up different parts of a habitat to help ensure it remains fully functional as a place for feeding, breeding, and rearing young.

Native plant species are favoured for this environmental management method because they tend to establish themselves quicker and remain more resilient so they can survive better in local conditions over the long term.

## Beneficial outcomes

Outcomes from the EAFRD project have been beneficial on a number of fronts. Importantly, the results demonstrated new ways of working that have changed the behaviour of people responsible for managing environmental areas. Ms Volebele also draws attention to the project’s nature benefits. “We are very content with the results of our project which has worked well by creating new habitat areas for biodiversity along roadsides, around river banks and in between farm fields.”

“In addition to biodiversity benefits, the spontaneous vegetation that was introduced beside water courses has helped to strengthen the river banks and this is an important natural form of flood protection. The plants also act as filters that can help to prevent nitrates from polluting fresh water supplies. New foliage shades aquatic species from too much direct sunlight and can make the local landscape more attractive.”



© Association Arbres et Paysage 32

“On farmland, our new approach has helped to improve the availability of biodiversity habitat features and enhance the productivity of soils. Other socio-economic and environmental benefits emerged from our choice of plant species to introduce along roadsides.”

“Here we found that they were useful for biodiversity but the project also helped to reduce erosion, which led to less mud on the roads and so improved safety. This saves municipalities money because the road surfaces do not need to be cleaned as regularly as before the project.”

“Our project has been very useful and it has made a real positive difference to the areas where we applied the new differentiated management techniques. Moreover, once the spontaneous vegetation is established it now manages itself virtually for free.” For more information, visit: <http://eau-et-biodiversite.fr/index.html>

*“Our project has been very useful and it has made a real positive difference to the areas where we applied the new differentiated management techniques.”*

**Hélène Volebele,  
Arbres et paysages 32**

# Innovation support

## New smart phone app assists Austrian food producers

**E**AFRD support has been key to the modernisation of Europe's agri-food sector through projects that, among other things, include adding value to farm produce, enhancing quality aspects, and pro-actively promoting the excellence of Member States' food and drink goods.

One increasingly popular way of promoting regional food products is through a short supply-chain approach, which involves local farmers, traders, food outlets, and regional authorities all working together to improve the supply of local food for local people.

Such 'direct sales' approaches are encouraged by the EAFRD and an interesting approach to coordinating the promotion of direct sales supply chains can be seen in Austria. Here the EAFRD has been used with considerable effect to introduce high-tech tools for helping to connect consumers with food producers throughout the countryside.

### Farm goodies

The project is called 'goodies from the farm' and it centres around an online database of agri-food services that can be accessed directly through the project's website ([www.gutes-vombauernhof.at](http://www.gutes-vombauernhof.at)) as well as through a special smart phone app that was developed by the project.

Around 1600 'Good farm holdings' are involved in the project, which also takes in other retail outlets from six different Austrian regions. Consumers are able to use the app and website to find out where they can buy different types of local produce, like bread, meat, dairy, vegetables, fruit, juice, honey, herbs etc.

Stefan Stinglmayr is the project's coordinator and he clarifies the initiative's goals, "It is not intended to sell products via the platform. The aim is to attract customers to the businesses



and their farm products. Then they can get to know the people involved in producing and selling the food. This leads to more personal customer relations which is good for both the consumers and businesses."

The high-tech EAFRD project allows consumers to receive up to date information about what type of produce is on offer in different locations, the opening hours for the outlets, and even navigation options to help ensure that customers can easily find the food products they are searching for. Users of the smart phone app can even set it up so they receive a notification whenever they are close-by one of the participating sales points.

### Local food benefits

Domestic products are prioritised and in fact, the main aim of the project is to increase sales of Austrian farm products.



Outcomes are intended to underpin core elements of the rural economy in sustainable ways. For example, by working together, businesses participating in local food projects like this can find new ways of selling more of their products and attracting new types of customers.

Furthermore, reducing the number of businesses involved in a supply chain from producer to customer can increase the share of the final price received by those firms involved. Fewer links can also facilitate more affordable food and make it easier for everyone to know where the food comes from.

Stronger connections can be established between local agricultural, tourism and food supply sectors. In addition, consumption of local food products in rural areas leads to reduced food transport. This can create economic, environmental, and social benefits such as transport cost savings, fewer emissions, less wear and tear on rural roads, reduced traffic congestion and associated improved road safety. The 'goodies from the farm' EAFRD project does just that, and this potential can in part be attributed to the project winning a finalist position in the top four projects of a national competition profiling 'Climate protection in agriculture'.

## Customer relations

Feedbacks from users about the project's services have been very encouraging and Mr Stinglmayr sees more scope to develop the initiative. "We are pleased with our successes so far and we know that more opportunities exist because customers tell us they are pleasantly surprised to find so many farms offering so many goodies. We are exploring how more business can be involved and there is interest from enterprises such as wine taverns and other parts of the bio-economy. The app is very relevant for them since it offers them an additional marketing tool."



As more people make use of the 'goodies from the farm' services, the project has realised that it needs to evolve in time with technological developments. "One of our challenges relates to making the service easier to use on different types of smart phones and tablets", says Mr Stinglmayr. "We need to keep up to date with the technology that consumers are using because screen resolutions and screen sizes are continually improving so we need to be able to adapt our app to ensure it is able to operate well with the latest equipment."

*"The aim is to attract customers to the businesses and their farm products. Then they can get to know the people involved in producing and selling the food. This leads to more personal customer relations which is good for both the consumers and businesses."*

**Stefan Stinglmayr,**  
Gutesvombauernhof project coordinator

# Cooperation and networking

## Baltic businesses benefit from transnational cooperation

The EAFRD includes a useful collection of funding measures for helping rural businesses to improve their competitiveness. Results from this support helps local companies (many of which are often very small family businesses) to continue their activities and so continue to provide EU citizens with benefits such as quality food, interesting rural tourism services, and an attractive countryside.

Business networking is promoted by the EAFRD as an effective rural development tool for improving competitiveness. Networking can help businesses to cooperate and learn from each other, share costs, identify new ideas, and increase their impact. Significant successes have been achieved by the EAFRD in these areas, which are not just limited to cooperation between businesses at local or regional levels, but also extend across borders via transnational cooperation projects.

EU rural development funds have been supporting transnational cooperation for more than 20 years through the LEADER Local Actions Groups (LAGs). A great deal of useful advice and experience has been collated on this topic to assist networking around rural Europe. This is available through the ENRD website<sup>6</sup>.

A good example of the benefits that can be achieved by business cooperation between LAG areas in Member States is the 'cross-border entrepreneurs' project that was jointly funded by the RDPs from Sweden and Poland.



© LAGs Blekinge-Warmia-Mazury

### Baltic connections

The idea to seek new business opportunities through cooperation across the Baltic Sea started in Sweden's Blekinge LAG area. A Polish-born tourism operator there was keen to strengthen links between Blekinge and LAGs from Poland in order to identify new options for new business products that could be mutually beneficial for both countries.

LEADER funding was used to carry out fact-finding visits that connected Swedish businesses from Blekinge with Polish companies in Warmia-Mazury. All of the businesses involved were selected by the LAGs for their strong entrepreneurial spirits and potential for using transnational cooperation to export new products or expand their market share.

Tourism and food services provided a common focus for the EAFRD project, which successfully networked more than 250 participants during 15 different cooperation events. Much of the work involved seeking, developing, testing, and marketing a range of new culinary heritage and eco-tourism opportunities.

Partnership consortiums and product development groups formed to work on specific business ideas between the two countries. Outcomes led to new approaches for joint marketing and advertising that put in place sales agents with the same nationality as client groups that were being targeted by rural businesses.

This 'matchmaking' process saw three formerly unemployed Poles set up their own small firms to provide professional services and five new micro-enterprises were launched in Blekinge.

Other positive impacts from the business connections included the set up and/or promotion of new culinary tourist routes, a 'paradise garden' and forest photo safaris. A special logo has now been developed to help brand this EAFRD project's new business products.

## Business benefits

Tommy Svensson from Sweden's Blekinge LAG is pleased with the business benefits that have been created saying, "Our project has been very successful for 29 small rural businesses that have learned a lot from working together. For instance, a Swedish fish smoking business was inspired by a visit to a Polish cheese smoking company, which led to cooperation between the fish smoker and a local goat farm here resulting in a new smoked cheese for Swedish consumers. Polish smoked cheeses are well known, but Sweden does not have the same culinary heritage and it was the LAG cooperation that helped identify this business diversification option for Swedes."



© LAGs Blekinge Warmia-Mazury

"Another example of how the networking project has helped our businesses to be more competitive relates to exchanges between traders at rural markets. Polish bread makers found new customers through participating at Swedish Christmas markets. And Swedish firms received prizes for the quality of their market products from a famous Polish chef. The business reported that after Polish visitors to his shop in Sweden saw the prize, he sold double the amount of his products."

*"Our project has been very successful for 29 small rural businesses that have learned a lot from working together."*

**Tommy Svensson,  
Blekinge LAG**

# Cooperation and networking

## Transnational cooperation between schools leads to stronger local food chains

Member States have the possibility to give priority to EAFRD projects that promote co-operation between businesses, organisations and communities involved in rural development activity. The EU policy document that governs EAFRD operations<sup>7</sup> reinforces this point. It states that EAFRD support for cooperation should be provided in various forms, confirming that:

“Clusters and networks are particularly relevant to the sharing of expertise as well as the development of new and specialised expertise, services and products. Pilot projects are important tools for testing the commercial applicability of technologies, techniques and practices in different contexts, and adapting them where necessary.”

For this reason, the ENRD has been a proactive advocate of EAFRD projects that help to better connect rural Europe. A noteworthy example of the benefits that can result from such cooperation is the ‘Growing Astronauts’ project, which linked up rural development groups from Estonia (Hiiumaa Cooperation Network, and West Estonian Islands Partnership), France (LAG Pays Vallée du Loir), and the United Kingdom (Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership, and Central Warwickshire Villages LAG).

### School food cooperation

Communities from these quite different parts of rural Europe (in terms of geography and culture) found common ground in their interests to strengthen links between schools



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and local food producers. Each of the areas had already identified a demand for rural development projects that could promote short supply-chains to connect farmers with local food consumers. Their aim for working together in a transnational partnership therefore focused on piloting new ways of learning from each other's endeavours in this field.

Involving local school pupils in the project's learning process was another main goal for all of the participants. The pupils would be able to learn about farming practices and food preparation, as well as better relate to the benefits of buying local food. Cultural exchange aspects of the projects would also help the children to improve their language skills, make use of modern communication technologies, and provide a positive experience of European integration in practice.

Charlotte Comare, Cultural Representative of Pays Vallée du Loir, feels that the project has succeeded in its objectives. “Our cooperation created a lot of useful outcomes for everyone involved and it would not have been possible to achieve these results if we had been working alone. We learned a great deal from each other through our exchange visits and online meetings and we were then able to apply this new knowledge to our own situations and circumstances.”

One of the most useful results was the increased understanding among schools and farmers about each other. This has built up a very useful body of trust, which is important for sustaining the relationships that were developed between school chefs, teachers, pupils, and food producers.

Pupils who participated in the project were able to visit farms and see the food production process for themselves. Chefs were able to verify the care that farmers take when producing high quality local food and thus increase the schools’ willingness to purchase regularly through short supply-chains.

Exchanges between the school chefs were also fruitful and led to new skills being learned about the different culinary traditions in each country. Special dishes were then prepared

by the chefs to allow Estonian pupils to taste French and English school food as well as vice-versa.

Longer-term benefits from the project are expected since all of the communities are now more enthused and motivated to continue working to develop short supply-chains. “Setting up the cooperation project was difficult and time-consuming but it has been worthwhile because we now know much more about building short supply-chains between schools and local farmers. These techniques and methods were not very well known or sufficiently developed before the project but now we are all in much stronger positions”, comments Charlotte Comare.

“In Estonia, the two islands groups are pioneers in their country of this type of rural development. The English schools are also now well connected to local food producers and here in France we have even set up a new logistical centre as a result of the transnational project. This centre is successfully connecting farmers with schools and we expect it will act as a good demonstration project that could be replicated in other rural areas.”

*“Our cooperation created a lot of useful outcomes for everyone involved and it would not have been possible to achieve these results if we had been working alone.”*

**Charlotte Comare,  
LAG Pays Vallée du Loir**



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# Social inclusion

## Improving the quality of social farming facilities in Spain

Europe's farms provide EU citizens with a great many benefits. Whilst food production and countryside maintenance remain important outputs from agricultural holdings, farms are also increasingly used for health and therapeutic purposes. Developments in this 'Social Farming' sector (also referred to as 'Green Care') offer useful opportunities to help farmers to diversify their income base, and it helps to highlight the positive contributions that agriculture makes to society. Social farms therefore represent a potential growth area for Member States' rural economies.

Different types of on-farm care facilities can be developed and successful Green Care businesses regularly operate in partnership with public or private sector healthcare institutions. In this way the institutions oversee the professional care services and the farmers provide the therapeutic facilities.

Green Care activity often involves relatively simple services like helping social farm clients to improve key skills, such as personal responsibility, by looking after animals, taking care of crops, or managing wildlife habitats. These routine rural activities are very constructive for social farm clients, and the EAFRD represents an effective source of support to set up and enhance such rural healthcare services.



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### L'Olivera

Experiences from Spain's L'Olivera cooperative in Catalonia highlight how the EAFRD can be used to help develop social farming projects that create win-win outcomes for rural areas and citizens with special needs. The cooperative specialises in organic agriculture as well as producing wine and olive oil. Its workforce includes people with disabilities who gain a great deal of personal development, as well as pleasure, from working at the cooperative.

L'Olivera Director, Carles de Ahumada, explains the cooperative's activities. "Our organisation has two main roles: the inclusion of people with mental disabilities, especially those in less advantaged social situations; and we are also very focused on helping to develop the rural economy by using local resources".

"By processing our agricultural products ourselves we can add value to the basic crops. This approach brings in more money to the local area and it is useful for social integration of disabled people because it provides a variety of different options to involve people in the production and processing processes."

## Social development

Some 36 people work at the cooperative. Nine jobs have been created for people with disabilities and their tasks include various manual labour duties, such as product labelling. All of the L'Olivera wine and olive oil is labelled by hand, which allows the cooperative to promote its produce as being made with great care and personal attention to detail.

Support from the EAFRD helped to create three of the job places for people with special needs, through a development project that modernised the wine production process and upgraded L'Olivera's visitor facilities. "We received rural development funding to cover part of the costs involved in installing new temperature control mechanisms during the fermentation

of our wine. This has been useful for the wine production process because it gives us higher quality wines."

"We also used the rural development funds to improve our reception area and tasting room at our premises where visitors come to try our products. This was important because we continue to attract an increasing number of tourists and we want to give them a good impression of our work here", says Mr de Ahumada.

L'Olivera's involvement in rural tourism is appreciated by other regional businesses providing visitor services. These are taking advantage of the development benefits that can be obtained from working together to promote local food and wine products through 'enotourism' marketing.

A series of enotourism routes are in place to direct tourists around the mountainous scenery where L'Olivera is located. These include a route along the Corb river valley which encourages tourists to visit different shops, restaurants, farms, and other places providing local food and wine specialities.

"Our visitors are interested in the quality of our olive oil and wine, which has been endorsed several times at national and international level. Such recognition helps to boost our workers' enjoyment of their jobs, which is good from a therapeutic perspective. It also reinforces the reputation of social businesses like ours as providers of not just quality rural care services, but also quality agricultural products as well", sums up Mr de Ahumada.

*"Our organisation has two main roles: the inclusion of people with mental disabilities, especially those in less advantaged social situations; and we are also very focused on helping to develop the rural economy by using local resources".*

**Carles de Ahumada,  
L'Olivera Director**



# Social inclusion

## Tackling fuel poverty in rural France



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**F**uel poverty (also referred to as energy deprivation) happens when a household is unable to afford the most basic levels of energy for adequate heating, cooking, lighting and use of appliances in the home.

Negative impacts from fuel poverty include restricted heating use, cold and damp homes, debts on utility bills and reduced household expenditure on other essential items. In addition, fuel poverty is associated with physical and mental health illnesses, including depression, asthma and heart disease.

Fuel poverty is present in all Member States and data from the EU Fuel Poverty Network<sup>8</sup> indicates that the problem is particularly acute in Eastern and Southern Europe, where energy deprivation disproportionately troubles rural households and those affected by unemployment.

Risk of fuel poverty in rural areas can be high because properties are often not connected to gas networks and mitigation measures may be more expensive or difficult to carry out. Problems can be further exacerbated for rural families suffering from other social exclusion problems related to low

incomes and vulnerability. These rural residents may depend on the social housing sector and not be eligible for energy efficiency grants or initiatives that are provided for owners of private homes.

A social inclusion project in central France has successfully helped to address this issue of rural fuel poverty, and EAFRD co-finance was provided to bolster the project's beneficial rural development outcomes.

### Affordable homes

Utility charges were one of the underlying factors behind the launch of this EAFRD project, which recognised the role that energy efficiency measures can play in reducing social exclusion caused by families at risk from fuel poverty.

Virginie Boireau, Coordinator of the project's partner organisation, Association Les Compagnons Bâisseurs, points out that, bills are often the most hard-to-pay domestic costs for families in difficulty. So we wanted to assist families to control this basic and essential expenditure in order to make their daily life easier and more affordable."



Project actions were planned and implemented through a coordinated approach by local authorities and social support agencies. Their main aim involved identifying a group of families who would volunteer to be trained in energy efficiency actions that used energy monitoring tools and energy saving devices. These families would then act as 'energy efficiency ambassadors' to show their friends and neighbours the savings that could be achieved by changing the way they use energy and water.

Some 24 ambassador families participated in the project and Ms Boireau recalls that, "It was difficult to find ambassador families who were able to devote the time needed. We held public information meetings to explain the project and these events helped to attract volunteers. The local agencies and authorities were also very useful in identifying volunteers and sharing the appropriate skills with the families involved."

"From our experiences, we learned that the success of projects like this needs the right type of preparations. Time is needed to ensure the families understand their role and how the project will benefit them. It is useful to spend as much time as possible building good relationships between the project team and the ambassador families. This helps the families to feel at ease, increases their sense of ownership of the project and their willingness to encourage other families to be more efficient in the way that they consume resources", explains Jean-Baptiste Massé, Animator of LAG Parc naturel régional de la Brenne.

## Cost savings

Project participants received water and energy measuring instruments, such as power meters and flow meters. Other low-cost equipment including multi-sockets for plugs with a switch, low energy light bulbs, and shower-stop systems were also tested by the ambassador families. Their findings were then presented to the local community during 'eco-gesture' events.

"Thanks to the installation of water and energy measuring instruments and equipment to reduce consumption, the families were able to show their neighbours that they could save



© Les Compagnons Bâtisseurs Bretagne

more than €100 a year in electricity bills and more than 50 cubic metres of water", verifies Ms Boireau.

Visualising consumption in euros per year helps people to become aware of their behaviour. This method proved to be effective and persuasive for mobilising other families to adopt energy efficiency measures. One of the ambassador households whose two children slept with small lamps lit all night was happy to discover that low energy bulbs only consumed around €2.90 of power each year. The same family also used the power meters to spread the message around their friends and neighbours that they could save nearly €70 from turning a television off when no-one is watching it.

Such savings highlighted by the EAFRD project have not only helped to tackle social exclusion in rural areas but they also make positive contributions to the Member States' goals concerning climate change.

*"Energy and water bills are often the most hard-to-pay domestic costs for families in difficulty."*

**Virginie Boireau,**  
Coordinator of the Association  
« Les Compagnons Bâtisseurs »

# Young people

## French EAFRD project helps support young rural entrepreneurs



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Young people represent the future of rural Europe and the EAFRD provides a useful toolkit of funding options to help improve opportunities for younger people in the countryside. These include projects aimed at increasing living standards and quality of life for the younger generation of rural residents. Measures in the RDPs are also available to help younger people to enjoy successful rural careers in sectors like agriculture, forestry, food, and local services.

A mix of different employment support options exists in the EAFRD toolkit for young people. Business mentoring, skills training, peer networking and investment aid are all possibilities that young people can take advantage of from the RDPs.

Results from a successful EAFRD project in France's Midi-Pyrenees region reveals what can be achieved by coordinating such support for young entrepreneurs.

### Youth employment

Named, 'Place aux Jeunes' the project's title explains its main aim of ensuring a place for young people in the development of their rural region. Demand for the project stemmed from research carried out by authorities in the Pays du Ruthénois area that showed the negative impacts of youth depopulation pressures. Other findings from the territorial analysis highlighted gaps in career start-up support for young people and particularly for those with ideas for their own business ventures.

An EAFRD project plan was therefore formulated to redress this gap in support services for younger people between 18 and 35 years of age. It took a flexible approach and opened its doors to encourage any young person with any type of business idea to participate.



A group of 12 individual young entrepreneurs were attracted to the project, all of who were over 25 years old. The project started by providing each of them with a detailed understanding about how the local authorities, agencies, and business groups could be used to help younger people set up and succeed in business.

Guidance was then provided by experienced business advisors on the skills that the young entrepreneurs would need to start their own professions. Feedback on this aspect of the project was very positive with participants commenting how the support reinforced their identity as entrepreneurs and made them more confident.

Other participants noted how “it was very useful to see things that we should avoid”, and pointed to the benefits for them from meeting with decision-makers who could help support their business ideas.

### Rural enterprise

Hélène Maviel was one of the project’s young entrepreneurs and she remarks how the business mentoring helped her, stating that, “It was very enriching and maybe the most important part of the training. We could benefit from the experience of people who have already been in our situation, who really know what they are talking about.”

Ms Maviel went on to use the project to set up a new rural tourism business, and she has plans to further strengthen her self-employed position by developing a novel educational

farm (where the presentations and itineraries will be provided in English as a niche language training facility.)

Another example of the new businesses that were supported by the project includes Marlène Enjalbert’s animal-assisted-therapy service. This rural enterprise involves using dogs as a form of treatment to improve people’s social, emotional, or cognitive functioning.

Ms Enjalbert had qualifications in canine education and the EAFRD project helped her launch her career as a self-employed provider of animal-assisted-therapy services for children and elderly people. “It’s a wonderful means of communication, above all for people with difficulties”, says Ms Enjalbert who is now running her own business and working with clients from retirement homes and medical centres specialised in the development of patients’ muscular and movement skills.

### Future prospects

By the end of the EAFRD project, three new businesses had been realised, four more were under development and expected to start in the near future, while a further five business ideas from the young entrepreneurs were under development with longer term horizons.

Marie-Manuela Sandu was involved with the project’s delivery and she is also pleased with its achievements saying that, “the initiative was considered as a great success for the local authorities involved. The authorities are willing to repeat this operation and the project could be expanded to act as a ‘breeding ground’ for mobilising more young entrepreneurs.”

*“We could benefit from the experience of people who have already been in our situation, who really know what they are talking about.”*

**Hélène Maviel,  
EAFRD project beneficiary**

## New jobs for graduates from Lithuania's tourist guide academy

Rural tourism continues to be a growth sector for young people in many Member States, where the EAFRD works in parallel with other Funds (from EU and national sources) to invest in projects that attract tourists to visit and discover the countryside. These types of rural development projects range from introducing new types of tourism facilities and services to modernising or upgrading existing amenities.

A common goal for EAFRD tourism projects lies in providing high quality experiences that encourage visitors to stay longer and better appreciate the diversity that rural regions offers. Skills training forms a key part of regional tourism strategies (especially for new entrants like young people) because hospitality and information services are so important to the success of 'tourist experiences'. These visitor impressions are increasingly important for tourism providers as more visitors use social media channels to provide feedback about their experiences. Positive feedback can help to generate more business, whereas negative online comments may deter new tourists from using a service or visiting an area.



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### Tourism Academy

In Lithuania's Zarasai Region, the EAFRD has been used to provide such skills for younger people through a new 'Academy' project for rural tourist guides. This RDP initiative was introduced to highlight how rural tourism businesses can be developed as alternatives (and/or supplements) to more traditional forms of rural employment. Project objectives hence focused on helping encourage young people to stay in rural areas, and counter the strong youth depopulation pressures that regions like Zarasai suffer from.

Zarasai holds significant potential as a visitor destination due to the great natural beauty of its unspoiled countryside and its interesting array of cultural tourism attractions. However, gaps existed in the availability of qualified visitor guides and so the project was launched to train ten people from Zarasai's younger generation as professional tourist guides.

Each rural community in the Zarasai region now has its own specialist tourist guide thanks to the EAFRD project. They have been trained, using techniques endorsed by Lithuania's national Tourism Department, to provide information and advice services for domestic and international visitors in the region. The guides can also provide information and advice to businesses providing tourism services.

An essential part of the training involved learning about what tourists like to know about, including the best ways for discovering a region's particular specialities and cultural assets. This aspect of the training was especially useful for the Academy project participants, as noted by Svetlana Veikšrienė who graduated from the course and is now a qualified rural tourism guide. "I am from Zarasai and I was always interested in my region's history, development, and surroundings. Being engaged in the area through the project motivated me to search for new opportunities."

"I find that tourists are very interested in the services that I provide as a qualified guide. Visitors ask a lot about the history and development of the rural communities and their products. Our area's local crafts are a popular topic among tourists. I really enjoy communicating with people about these things and spreading knowledge about the best things in my region."

## Cooperation benefits

Ms Veikšrienė has a positive outlook on future demand for her tourism services and she believes that this can be developed even further through increased cooperation between tourist guides and other tourism providers. "It would be good to work closer with the Zarasai Region Tourist Information Centre because this is a place where many visitors come to first of all when they arrive in our region."

"The quality of the services that are provided by qualified guides like myself could be advertised through this Centre. At the moment we get most of our business from Internet bookings and closer cooperation in the tourism sector here could help everyone."

Such cooperation would help to further improve the region's rural tourism economy and provide more opportunities for younger people like Ms Veikšrienė to stay in their home areas. "As soon as a person becomes a qualified guide it is easier to plan for the future in a rural area because it provides work possibilities. The training project had a significant impact on me deciding to stay in the local community and earn a reasonable living", acknowledges Ms Veikšrienė.

*"Being engaged in the area through the project motivated me to search for new opportunities."*

**Svetlana Veikšrienė,  
Zarasai tourist guide**



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# Communication tools

## Broadband Internet connections in the UK countryside

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) are considered by Member States to be essential tools for unlocking the potential of rural areas and making them more attractive places to live, work, and visit. ICT represents a valuable rural development tool, which offers a wide range of beneficial opportunities for Europe's countryside.

Broadband Internet technology is one of the indispensable ICT tools that will influence the long-term prosperity of rural areas, and EAFRD co-finance has been used by Member States to improve the supply of rural broadband services. This occurs through investment support for ICT infrastructure as well as through 'softer' approaches that encourage rural communities to identify their own broadband solutions.

RDP experiences from Wales in the United Kingdom highlight the effectiveness of such softer approaches to using EAFRD for facilitating improved broadband access.



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### Community-led solutions

Many Welsh rural areas suffer from poor broadband connectivity, typically less than 2Mb/s. Some parts of the countryside have been further disadvantaged by uncertainty about whether Internet providers will provide a high quality broadband coverage.

Residents and businesses in the more remote areas of Monmouthshire County wanted to address this problem and

they received help from the Welsh RDP to investigate possibilities from community-led solutions. EAFRD support was used to carry out feasibility study research that gave the communities the initial knowledge they needed to help them respond effectively to their needs in the 'Information Society'.

Findings from the study provided the communities with a sound basis about how to lessen the 'digital divide' through

clearer understanding of the main issues that can affect access to appropriate broadband facilities.

Referring to the study, Mike Powell from Monmouthshire County Council, notes how it, “confirmed the detail that was required to identify the worse affected areas and where community-led solutions could be viable. It also confirmed that lack of broadband access could deter economic development in these areas, as well as impact negatively on quality of life.”

## Local broadband networks

Recommendations in the feasibility report underlined the benefits from empowering communities to take forward their own ideas for accessing broadband. Logistical support was also suggested to help communities form their own ‘local broadband groups’ and, as a result, four different groups were set up. These covered the areas around Penallt, Grosmont, Llandenny, and Devauden.

Mr Powell observes how, “canvassing individuals in those communities helped them to constitute groups capable of coordinating the technical and financial programme that followed. In Grosmont for instance, they deliberately looked for group members with technical skills, especially broadband technologies, financial skills, and the dynamic skill to muster support from their community. The group was hungry to secure a good broadband solution as they saw the opportunity to grow their own businesses from home, enjoy the benefits of on-line schooling, home shopping and all the benefits that were perceived as belonging only to the larger conurbations.”

Each group had an ambitious set of tasks involving: stimulating demand in their community; applying for funding and raising finance; identifying suppliers and negotiating the best technology and business model; procuring suppliers; and managing the delivery of their solution for the community.



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Actively engaging with the community to drive uptake of the broadband service was also a high and on-going priority for the groups.

Penallt’s broadband group became the first to deliver their solution”, says Mr Powell. “They were passionate about the opportunity to have at last a good broadband solution. They had the ability to call on outside assistance to manage the finances, the technical appraisals, and project management for installing a microwave link that connected through existing phone lines.”

A wireless solution was also found for Grosmont, and fibre was used to connect Devauden with its nearest access point which was some distance away.

## Success factors

Mr Powell is happy to report that successful outcomes from the EAFRD project have, “enabled people to work from home and expand their businesses, keeping more money in rural areas. Families are now able to enjoy a much wider range of online services.”

As many as 450 homes and businesses now enjoy a faster broadband speed due to this project - making the homes more technologically accessible and the businesses more economically competitive.

He notes the benefits of factors such as, “focusing on the potential demand for the service and perseverance”, concluding that “the important thing to consider is how will the service be maintained and operated in the future - and can this be achieved sustainably?”

*“Lack of broadband access could deter economic development in these areas, as well as impact negatively on quality of life.”*

**Mike Powell,**  
Monmouthshire County Council

# Communication tools

## Explaining agriculture's ecological achievements in Austria



© Max Albrecht

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Communication can be used in different ways for improving the effectiveness of RDP activities. Accordingly, the ENRD has been proactive in providing advice and guidance to Member States about useful approaches for communicating the EAFRD.

A 'communication gateway' on the ENRD website<sup>9</sup> hosts a diverse collection of different communication examples from Member States. This unique library of rural development material reflects core ENRD tasks involved in identifying and transferring good practices that can be useful for improving the effectiveness of RDPs (in order to gain more and better benefits from the EAFRD for EU citizens).

One way that the ENRD identifies this knowledge base about RDP good practices is by following the outcomes of

rural development competitions and award schemes that the Member States organise. Many of these schemes are run by NRNs, and other EAFRD stakeholders also organise their own dedicated prizes for good practices.

Such schemes are valuable because they can be designed to focus the attention of RDP beneficiaries, the general public, or others, on particular types of rural development actions that are considered as a high priority for communication. Resultant good practices can then be used to inspire the replication of similar activities elsewhere. Prize ceremonies may also attract media attention, which helps to further disseminate and communicate key messages about the EAFRD.



## Meadow Championship

An excellent example of this communication approach is the Vorarlberg Meadow Championship in Austria. It received EAFRD project support for its role in identifying and explaining environmental good practices on farmland meadows in Vorarlberg (a county with a high proportion of RDP beneficiaries from Austria's agri-environment measure).

Max Albrecht has been involved with the championship and he explains its main aims. "We know that farmers take a lot of pride in their work and this can be seen in their commitments to competitions such as those judging the quality of farm livestock breeds or food products. We also know that farmers make vital contributions to conserving the environment and so the idea of our competition was to tap into their pride about the results of their environmental management work here in Vorarlberg".

"We frequently forget that the maintenance of rural landscapes very often requires a great deal of effort. The Meadow Championship intends to make people aware of what farmers do to preserve our cultural landscapes. At the same time, the Meadow Championship also shows that farmland habitats for plants and wildlife species can be protected most effectively when land management methods are adapted to the specific needs of these species' habitats."

Hence the championship is organised with multipurpose communication goals. These intend to raise awareness among farmers about good practice techniques for nature conservation, as well as increase the general public's understanding about farmers' roles in protecting landscapes and wildlife.

## Award winners

Three different prize categories comprise the Meadow Championship. They cover awards for farms that have achieved outstanding environmental achievements on either a particular part of their land or throughout their entire farm holding. A further prize is given for environmental performance on Alpine farms.

Each entry is assessed by expert agri-ecologists who visit the farm to inspect the meadows and appraise the outcomes from the various agri-environment techniques. All participating farms are then evaluated using transparent selection procedures and the winners are named at an annual ceremony.

"Winning farmers are selected for their skills in cost-effective nature conservation and their ability to successfully balance multi-functional agricultural businesses. The prizes praise future-oriented farmers who recognise the long-term importance, to both their business and the wider rural economy, of taking responsibility for protecting biodiversity", informs Mr Albrecht.

Some 400 farmers have entered the competition and been assessed for their meadow conservation contributions. All of the participants receive a certificate that confirms their farm's ecological credentials, and some farmers have used this as marketing tool to help advertise the environmental quality of their products.

Top prize winners in the three categories not only gain a great deal of positive publicity but they also win an all-expenses-paid skills training trip to learn about good practice agri-environment methods on other farms in Austria.

Feedback from the winners reveals their satisfaction with this innovative EAFRD project that has good potential for replication in other Member States. "I would recommend my colleagues to participate in the Meadow Championship. When we got the certificate for the Meadow championship in September last year, we gained a lot of positive reactions from all our neighbours", concludes prize-winner Marianne Schindler.

*"The image of a beautiful and colourful flower meadow is highly appreciated by the population. However, few people know that this diversity is caused only by traditional land use practices."*

**Markus Grabher,  
Meadow Championship prize winner**

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Food projects



Forestry projects



Project linkages with other EU funds



Youth projects



Environmental services projects



Social inclusion projects



We would like to express our sincere thanks and appreciation to all National Rural Networks and Local Action Groups that participated in the selection process: Austria, Belgium (Flanders), Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, the United Kingdom (Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales).

**You can find the complete list of all project received on the ENRD website at the following link:**

*<http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/publications-and-media/eafrd-project-brochures/>*

# Rural Development Gateway 2014-2020

<http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/policy-in-action/cap-towards-2020/rdp-programming-2014-2020/>

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## EUROPEAN NETWORK FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT (ENRD)

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### Rural Development Gateway 2014-2020

Policy in Action > CAP towards 2020 > Rural Development Gateway 2014-2020

The ENRD Rural Development Gateway provides a bridge between the 2007-2013 and the 2014-2020 programming periods. It builds upon current experiences and knowledge with a view to guide the design and the implementation of the future rural development programmes. From RDP design to implementation, delve into specific policy areas and stay up-to-date with the latest news and views from the rural development community.

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1. Knowledge Transfer
2. Competitiveness
3. Food chains
4. Ecosystems
5. Resource efficiency
6. Social inclusion

Gateway Guide PDF

- 1. Introduction
- 2. Design
- 3. Implementation
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New on the Gateway

- 2014-2020 RDP regulations published
- LEADER evolution (Infographic) - [PDF]
- Knowledge Transfer & Innovation reports
- New guidance for establishment and operation of NRNs (PDF)

Upcoming events

- Innovation in the Rural National Network 2014-2020
- INTERREG IVC Thematic Capitalisation Event
- COMMUNITY-LED LOCAL DEVELOPMENT AT THE DAWN OF 2014-2020

European Network for Rural Development

European Evaluation Network in Rural Development

Legislation & Guidelines

RDP Planning

RDP Implementation

Insight from 2007-2013

Policy Overview 2014-2020

Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E)

Networking

Community-led Local Development (CLLD)

Candidate Countries

