

Rural Coalition position paper on the future of the Rural Development Policy post 2013

The Rural Coalition welcomes the three main objectives for the future CAP proposed by the European Commission. Viable food production, sustainable management of natural resources, and balanced territorial development will contribute to the EU 2020 goals¹. As major stakeholders we consider that these objectives cannot be achieved without farmers, land managers, forest owners, hunters and other rural actors. Our members manage three-quarters of EU land, and thus are the key drivers of the rural economy.

The Coalition stresses that **adequate resources need to be made available for the Rural Development Policy post 2013**, in order to meet the three objectives. The policy should help in maintaining rural areas as economically viable and competitive, preserve cultural landscapes and at the same time enhance the provision of ecosystem services. Furthermore, it must be easy to apply and avoid administrative burden.

The Coalition welcomes the proposed increased coherence between the five European funds (ERDF, ESF, CF, EMFF and the EAFRD) through a Common Strategic Framework. In addition, we call for the **EAFRD to be refocused on agriculture and forestry** and for the ERDF to address the structural development of rural areas.

The Coalition supports the Commission proposal to **move away from the Axis approach** and thereby addressing EU priorities which take into account the variability of the economy and the land use of rural areas.



¹ Europe 2020 puts forward three mutually reinforcing priorities: Smart growth - developing an economy based on knowledge and innovation; Sustainable growth - promoting a more resource efficient, greener and more competitive economy; Inclusive growth - fostering a high-employment economy delivering social and territorial cohesion.

The Coalition would like to draw the attention of EU Policy makers to the 6 proposed priorities:

- A **Competitive, profitable and viable agri-food and forestry sector** must be ensured. Emphasis must be put on improving the productivity whilst providing environmental benefits as well as meeting a range of new challenges such as climate change, water management, biodiversity loss, access to innovation and meeting renewable energy targets. This is a prerequisite for the economic, environmental and social sustainability of rural areas. **Generational renewal** in rural areas must be recognised and prioritised in the Rural Development programmes. We call for specific measures to attract young entrants into farming. This should be done by establishing sub-programmes for young farmers benefiting from higher maximum support rate under Pillar 2. Member States should also continue to have the option to apply an early retirement scheme in order to facilitate generation renewal.
- The integration of primary producers into the **value chain** needs to be ensured. It is not only important to **reinforce competitiveness** at farm and forest holding level but also to strengthen farmers' and forest owners position in the value chain by strengthening producer organisations and cooperatives by establishing the conditions for sectors to become organised. It is imperative to eliminate unfair and abusive commercial practices along the value chain to ensure a better functioning of the markets. The monitoring of competition policy and a better coordination between national competition authorities is also important.
- The sustainable management of rural areas enhances the provision of **ecosystem services**, such as drinking water, clean air, climate regulation, recreation and soil quality. It also has direct benefits for biodiversity and the protection of cultural landscapes. This must be adequately recognised and compensated in order to provide sufficient incentives.
- Support for areas facing **natural or other specific constraints** should be sufficiently maintained under the rural development policy. The Coalition is concerned with the delimitation of these areas, in particular the eight proposed biophysical criteria.
- **Resource efficiency**, part of the EU's 2020 Strategy, is an underlying objective to ensure a better use of scarce natural resources. The Coalition stresses the need to integrate environmental protection with the maintenance of the production capacity whilst contributing to efficiency and productivity. This calls for targeted measures for agriculture and forestry.
- The Rural Coalition highlights that in their activities our members account for the employment of millions of people in rural areas. Agriculture, forestry and recreational activities have a **high potential for growth and for job creation**. Rural Communities should be encouraged towards diversification of their activities and economies, in which agriculture and forestry are complemented by other thriving sectors, all contributing to the sustainability of rural communities and to the competitiveness of Europe.
- The Coalition welcomes the proposal to **reinforce innovation, training and advisory services** and the setting up of European Innovation Partnerships with the aim to address local needs. However, we are concerned about the "transmission" of research know-how to the end-users. Education, training, knowledge transfer and improved advisory services must also be made more accessible and target the needs of the users. The translation of R&D into innovation is important to ensure a better use of existing outputs, and develop technologies that are most relevant for farmers and rural communities and that can be easily transferred into their practices.

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