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NEWSLETTER FOR THE ENRD September 2009



Forests: a valuable asset for the future

Following the publication of a [report on the implementation of forestry measures under the Rural Development Regulation 1698/2005 for 2007–13](#), this FOCUS article looks at the issue of forestry.

The second most common type of land use in Europe is forestry, with 42% of the EU-27 covered by forests and wooded land. In contrast to trends elsewhere in the world, forest cover in the EU is slowly but steadily growing, thanks in part to afforestation programmes (planting of trees where there has previously been no forest) and natural regeneration on marginal lands.

Forests are one of Europe's most important natural assets and renewable resources, providing multiple benefits to society and the economy, often in areas of poverty or relative economic disadvantage. Forest owners and forestry itself have a special role to play in rural areas. Some 4 million people are employed in forestry and its downstream industries. As such, forestry is a core component of the Community Strategic Guidelines for Rural Development for 2007–13, being vital for land use and the management of natural resources in the EU's rural areas, and as a platform for economic diversification in rural communities.

The new report provides an overview of forestry measures included in the rural development programmes (RDP) of the Member States for 2007–13 based on the programmes adopted by the Commission in 2008. It found that all RDPs include some forestry measures, apart from those of Malta and Ireland. Of the more than 40 measures designed to achieve the objectives of the rural development policy, there are 14 forestry measures under axis 1 and 2 with

objectives directly related to forestry. Eight of these are dedicated only to various aspects of forest management.

Generally, the measures aim at promoting sustainable forest management and the multi-functional role of forests. Under the remaining measures, both agriculture and forestry-related activities can be supported, depending on the needs and circumstances of a given Member State or a region. Adding together the funding intended for forestry-specific (€6.2 billion) and forestry-related measures (€1–2 billion), the report concludes that some €8 billion will be made available from the Community budget (EAFRD) and up to € 16 billion in total.

With regard to axis 1, many measures focus on supporting training, investments to improve forests' economic value, adding value to forestry products and developing infrastructure. Around half of the RDPs plan to support advisory services for forestry, together with cooperation for developing new products (in many cases, for renewable energy production). 21 RDPs include support for producing short-rotation coppices within the measure to modernise agricultural holdings.

In the context of improving the environment and the countryside (axis 2), emphasis has been placed on first afforestation of agricultural land, restoring forestry potential, and non-productive investments. Most Member States have also included support for restoring forestry potential, prevention actions and non-productive investments in their programmes. Establishment of agro-forestry systems and Natura 2000 payments have been taken up to a clearly lesser extent.

In addition, some forestry-related actions are financed under axis 3, most commonly through

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the measure providing support for diversification into non-agricultural activities. Some programmes also include forestry actions within the scope of measures to support business creation and diversification and provision of basic services. In most cases these are related to the production of renewable energy.

Preparation of the report is part of the work carried out for the implementation of the EU Forest

Action Plan [http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/fore/action_plan/index_en.htm]. Following the Commission report the Standing Forestry Committee [http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/fore/sfc_en.htm] prepared an opinion on forestry related measures in rural development.

[Read the report and find out more about EU policies on forestry](#)



Forestry in the EU: facts and figures

- Forests are defined as land spanning more than 0.5 ha with trees higher than 5 metres and a canopy cover of more than 10%, or trees able to reach these thresholds in situ.
- The most densely forested Member States are Finland, Sweden and Slovenia, whereas the least forested are Malta, Ireland and the Netherlands.
- On average, only 73% of the EU's forest area is primarily designated for wood harvesting.
- Supplying wood under conditions of sustainable management means less felling than is replaced by natural re-growth (yearly increment).

Source: [Eurostat, 2005](#).

Confederation of European Forest Owners

Several important European NGOs are active in the field of forestry. One of them, the Confederation of European Forest Owners (CEPF) is a member of the EN RD Coordination Committee and Leader Subcommittee, representing the interests of European forest owners on the Committee and in the network. It is an umbrella association of national forest owner organisations in the EU working as the representative of family forestry in Europe.

The CEPF's mission is to assist and strengthen an economically viable, socially beneficial, culturally valuable and ecologically responsible sustainable management of private forests. At present it has 23 members representing national organisations from and outside of the EU and serves the interests of the approximately 16 million forest owners – private individuals and families who take care of more than half of the forest area of the EU.

As an example of its action areas, the CEPF and its member organisations have participated in the stakeholder process in the Commission since 1996 so that important family forest issues are included into the EU Forestry Strategy and its report. The CEPF is also on the Commission's [Advisory Group on Forestry and Cork](#) of the Commission's Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development (DG Agriculture), which supports the consultation process with forestry expertise. The Advisory Group has 49 seats in total, of which nine are allocated to CEPF national member associations.

In addition, the CEPF is a member of DG Agriculture's Advisory Group on Rural Development and is therefore in the position to defend family forest owners' interests in important development of EU policies regarding rural development.

More information on the CEPF can be found [here](#).

Tour of Member States

Our next stop on our tour of the EU – Bulgaria – comprises a territory of 111 000 km², 81% of which is classified as rural (national definition). This equates to 42% of its 7.8 million inhabitants. Bulgaria has the lowest level of GDP per capita in the EU-27 – only 40% of the EU-27 average in 2008. The rural economy is characterised by a high dependence on agriculture and highly polarised agricultural structures. There are few very large farms and many very small farms, with 72% of farms less than 1 ha. Rural development challenges are intensified by a combination of ageing population structures in local communities, significant out-migration to urban areas and abroad, as well as poor access to good quality basic services (roads, water & sewerage systems, etc.). Despite these issues, rural Bulgaria boasts a rich mix of natural and cultural resources which could provide sound foundations for sustaining a wide range of different development activities.

Bulgaria's Rural Development Programme for 2007-2013 includes a useful mix of support packages that have been designed to provide considerable scope for helping the country respond effectively to its rural areas' strengths, weaknesses and challenges. For example, some 41% of the funding allocated to the three axes of the RDP has been allocated to axis 1 which will help co-finance investments promoting productivity, efficiency and improved competitiveness in Bulgaria's farm, food processing and forestry sectors, for example by upgrading machinery and equipment or through investments to help meet EU standards. These important interventions will create higher quality business outputs that demonstrate improved environmental standards, both of which remain important goals to help Bulgaria's rural economy compete effectively in European and Global market places.

Other national development priorities for agriculture include efforts to improve farming structures, because adapting Bulgarian farming structures and systems towards market conditions is considered a key factor to help increase agricultural producers' productivity, plus income. RDP support for these objectives includes measures to encourage setting up by young farmers and transitional support to help the restructuring process for those semi-subsistence farms which have the potential to develop into viable commercial businesses. Data from the Bulgarian authorities reveals a 7.8% fall in the total number of farm holdings in the period 2005 to 2007 and increased land consolidation, underlining the significant restructuring process that is underway in Bulgaria's rural communities.

Further RDP operations linked to improving overall capacities in the country's farm and forest sectors include dedicated support for vocational training and advisory services. Particular emphasis is being placed on helping Bulgarian farmers access support under the RDP, and training for example to increase their application of new know-how covering business skills, modern technologies, or developing renewable energy sources. Environmental issues are also covered with training actions foreseen to help raise general awareness of Bulgarian farmers on environmental issues (e.g. climate change, biodiversity protection), and more targeted courses on the requirements under the Bulgarian Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions (GAEC) linked to cross-compliance, and under the various agri-environment schemes.

Sustainable management of agricultural and forest land is also prioritised through a considerable allocation of axis 2 funds (27% of the total financial resource for the three axes of the RDP). These funds are being used to encourage agricultural methods that make positive contributions to maintaining Bulgaria's important natural resource base. Agri-environmental measures are widely available under axis 2 and include promoting organic farming and conservation works that benefit the quality of soil or water, and maintenance of Bulgaria's biodiversity-rich High Nature Value grasslands. Compensation payments are also provided to help farmers in mountain regions, as well as other less favoured areas, prevent land abandonment or deterioration of biodiversity-friendly conditions. Other RDP support is envisaged for afforestation of some non-agricultural land, as well as for actions to prevent and restore forest land affected by forest fires, already a significant problem in Bulgaria and likely to increase with climate change.

Additional development benefits for Bulgarian rural communities are being rolled out through a series of socio-economic measures. Important RDP interventions here include actions that will help improve the quality of life in rural areas and their adaptation to changing circumstances. Particular attention is being paid to the axis 3 measures, which account for 31% of total amount for the three axes, to address Bulgaria's heavy dependency on a declining number of agricultural jobs, and lack of alternative employment options. These factors combine to exacerbate depopulation pressures in rural communities and drive vicious circles which further impact on the viability of essential local services.

RDP responses to such socio-economic concerns feature different types of economic diversification funds dedicated to helping micro-enterprises function and grow successfully. Auxiliary quality of life



rewards will result from upgrading the poor basic infrastructure networks and developing local services, since these remain a pre-requisite for local development across much of Bulgaria's countryside.

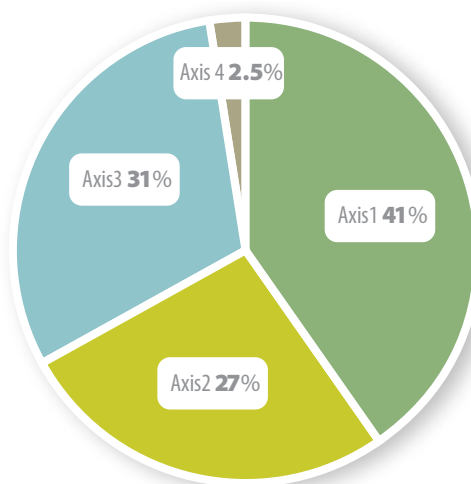
Part of the socio-economic developments carried out during the programming period will be channelled through the work of Leader Local Action Groups. Leader offers an innovative way to deliver support and develop local communities in the Bulgarian context, and is attracting a high level of interest from rural stakeholders in Bulgaria. By July 2009, applications for support to potential pre-Local Action Groups for preparing local strategies was received from groups covering around 60% of Bulgarian rural territory. A new call for similar proposals is now underway, funded by the axis 4 budget which receives 2.5% of the RDP funds.

Read more about the Bulgarian RDP
[\[Read more about the Bulgarian RDP\]](#)

Facts and figures

5.19 million ha of Bulgaria is defined as utilised agricultural areas (UAA). These produce mainly arable crops – cereals, oilseeds, etc., vegetables, vineyards; livestock production – predominantly cattle, sheep, pigs, goat and poultry [\[Source\]](#)

Bulgaria hosts a variety of biodiversity and important EU habitats. It sustains a significant share of High Nature Value farmlands, particularly on permanent grassland (34% of UAA), while 48% of the territory is mountainous/less favoured areas (LFAs) [\[Source\]](#)



Introducing the thematic working groups

Chaired by the European Commission, three thematic working groups of experts have been set up to focus on specific thematic priorities in order to provide in-depth analyses of the implementation of EU rural development policy and contribute to the understanding and diffusion of know-how and experiences.

The overall objective of the first thematic working group – *Targeting territorial specificities and needs in Rural Development programmes* – is to contribute to an efficient targeting of territorial specificities and needs in RDPs and to a more balanced development of rural areas across Europe. Within the overall scope of the topic, the group will aim to identify the main factors contributing to the diversity of rural areas in Europe and describe their typical characteristics: experience, difficulties, comparability.

In the first phase of the group's work programme (up to November 2009), the group will produce a report bringing together: findings on the apparent relevance and efficiency of targeting of territorial specificities and needs, and the common elements in rural development, contained within the existing RDPs, and; an examination of what could be the building blocks of a new typology to achieve greater efficiency in targeting and achieving a better balance in rural development. The detailed work plan of the second phase (2010–11), leading to the final outputs of the TWG, will be informed by the findings obtained during the first phase.

To date, the group has focused on analysing how Member States have defined or targeted rural areas for the current programming period through identifying the indicators or definitions that they have used for this purpose, the problems encountered and the solutions found in the process of definition. A questionnaire has been developed and revised using a pilot application in two countries – Poland and Spain. Based on the revised questionnaire, a desk study of the National Strategic Plan and the individual RDP (or a sample of RDPs in the case of regionalised programming) is being conducted.

The focus of the second working group – *Agriculture and the wider rural economy* – is to contribute to the identification and the description of the relationships and potential synergies/conflicts between agriculture and the wider rural economy. These relationships will be described for various types of rural territories such as peri-urban, intermediate and remote ones.

Phase 1 of the second working group's programme comprises two specific steps: the first aims at the identification of a possible typology of regions, based on the degree of linkages between the agri and non-agri sectors. The second step will analyse the main factors that have and will influence the relationships identified and investigated in step 1. To take place in 2010, the second phase will analyse the policy instrument set up by Member States with aim of identifying synergies between the agricultural and non-agricultural sectors.

So far, the group's activities have focused on examining the links between agricultural and the wider rural economy in 18 regions, with the aim of informing the identification of a typology of regions based on the interdependence between agriculture and the other economic sectors. 18 case studies will be carried out, at least one within each major typology element per selected region, which will demonstrate the degree of multifunctionality of rural businesses.

The third group – *Public goods and public intervention* – is working to establish a common understanding of the significance of the interaction between the agricultural sector and the provision of public goods, with a view to better understanding the mechanisms guiding the delivery of public goods and assessing the implications for future policy developments.

The group's work programme is divided into three phases: up to December 2009, January–May 2010, and June–September 2010. The first phase is focusing on establishing the conceptual framework, specifying the theoretical foundation, the context and practical examples of public goods provided through agriculture. On this basis, a screening is prepared to identify the relevant public goods across the EU-27 and the rural development measures used to deliver these public goods. The goal is to draw conclusions on which delivery mechanisms are most appropriate for the provision of public goods through agriculture. The second phase will seek to identify any social and economic spill-over effects from the provision of public goods and to evaluate the economic significance of

such effects within rural areas; and to assess which policy instruments are best placed to ensure the provision of public goods, and at which institutional levels decision making and implementation should take place. The focus of the third phase will be on the development and implementation of a communication strategy for disseminating the results of the group to a wider audience.

To date, the group has finalised the conceptual framework and put in place the tools for carrying out the first step of the work plan. Screening of 88 RDPs is now commencing, with an initial survey being carried out on a sample of four RDPs. [Find out more](#)

LEADERfest – EU LEADERS come together

Hosted by the Local Action Group (LAG) 'MAS Opavsko', in cooperation with the National Network of LAGs, the LEADERfest took place on 18–19 June 2009 in Hradec nad Moravici (Czech Republic). The event particularly targeted rural development stakeholders applying the Leader approach or who are interested in using the Leader method to facilitate local development in their rural areas. Participants came from all over the Czech Republic including several LAGs, and included also a representative of [European LEADER Association for Rural Development](#) and rural actors from five other EU Member States.

The first day saw rural actors from the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Estonia, Hungary, Poland and Greece provide a panorama on the status of LAG selection and the progress on programme implementation in their countries, including the potential for transnational cooperation. In the afternoon, environmental topics such as the sustainable use of natural resources including renewable energy were discussed, aiming to provide food for thought on the possibility of applying the Leader approach to future environmental activities.

A field visit was on the agenda for the second day. A locally developed GPS/mobile phone-based guide was demonstrated and could be tested on various tourist sites. Inspired by an article published in the [Leader+ Magazine](#), a local entrepreneur developed this regional tourist information management system. The field trip visited many places of interest, all of which are associated with the preservation of cultural heritage and the diversification of the rural economy. Among them were the horse breeding farm in Albertovec and the open-air museum of Bolatice, the latter of which has received support by the [Sapard programme](#). [Find out more \[in Czech\]](#)

Important information about Danish Local Action Groups

A new report was published in March 2009 on LAGs in Denmark, with the aim of understanding and increasing the visibility of the active members of the LAG boards. Produced by the Danish Institute for Rural Research and Development, the publication includes a survey of the composition of the LAGs and the activities that they had been engaged in during the initial phase of the programme



Legislation update

Following the FOCUS article in Issue 3 of *Rur@l News* 'Increasing broadband coverage in rural areas', [Council Regulation \(\(EC\) No 473/2009\)](#), agreed on 25 May, also reiterates the importance of support for broadband infrastructures in rural areas through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and the [European Economic Recovery Package](#). This Regulation amends previous Regulations on support for rural development by the EAFRD ([\(EC\) No 1698/2005](#)) and on the financing of the Common Agricultural Policy ([\(EC\) No 1290/2005](#)).

On the same day, a new [Decision was adopted by the Council](#) laying down the amount of EU support for rural development for 2007–13, its annual breakdown and the minimum amount to be concentrated in regions eligible under the Convergence Objective. This amends [Decision 2006/493/EC](#).

The implementing Regulation for this 'recovery package', laid down in [Commission Regulation \(EC\) No 482/2009](#), adopted on 8 June, also includes the possibility for Local Action Groups to request advance payments for running costs from the competent paying agency. This amount may not exceed 20% of the public financing relating to the operational costs. In order to make use of this possibility, Managing Authorities will have to request a respective modification of the RDP. Some RDPs allow advance payments already.

period 2007–13. The report found that Danish LAGs mainly work on area-based development within Axis 3 of the RDP concerning diversification of the rural economy and improvement of living conditions in rural areas.

The survey was based on two electronic questionnaires sent to all 704 LAG board members and 51 coordinators, with a response rate of 65%. There is a skewed gender and age distribution in the Danish LAG boards, with most being elder men, according to the results. Only 14% of the board members represent public authorities, meaning that there is

New Communication on agricultural product quality

Farmers "need to communicate better with consumers about the qualities of their products. The EU is willing to help in this effort. We have a golden opportunity to bring more coherence and simplicity to our various labelling and certification schemes," said Mariann Fischer Boel, Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development following the adoption of the [Communication on agricultural product quality policy](#) on 28 May 2009. Prompted by the need to improve communication about the qualities of agricultural products and to help reconnect farmers with consumers, this document lays down strategic orientations to improve the EU agricultural product quality policy.

In particular, in order to achieve a greater overall coherence and consistency of agricultural product quality policy, the Commission proposes that labelling should be extended to where an agricultural product is farmed and a unique register for all geographical indications (for wines, spirits and agricultural products and foodstuffs) should be created. In addition, the feasibility of laying down specific optional reserved terms for 'product of mountain farming' and 'traditional product' should be examined, with the latter to potentially replace the current 'Traditional Specialities Guaranteed' scheme. The single market for products under labelling schemes should be improved, particularly for organic products, as will international protection of geographical indications. The Communication also

progress left in order to achieve the Danish requirement of 30% public representation.

The review also looked at why board members and coordinators chose to get involved in the LAG boards, finding that the latter were motivated by professional or work-related reasons while the former principally become involved to stimulate local development or influence at a structural level. The objective with the highest priority for the work of the LAGs is settlement and trade development, while the development of nature and the environment has a slightly lower focus.



proposes the development of 'good practice' guidelines for private certification schemes to reduce the potential for consumer confusion and to red tape for farmers.

The Communication took into account the 560 contributions received in response to the Commission's [Green Paper on agricultural product quality](#) from October 2008 and input from the [high-level conference](#) organised by the Czech Presidency in March 2009. [Find out more](#)

BirdLife's view on how the EU rural development policy is delivering for biodiversity

A recent BirdLife study, published in May 2009, analyses the potential impact on biodiversity of the 2007-2013 Rural Development Programmes (RDP) across the EU, concluding that they "could do better". The review notes BirdLife partners' views that, being based on solid principles of good policy-making, rural development policy has considerable potential to tackle the biodiversity challenge. Examples of actions that are likely to benefit biodiversity have been highlighted in almost all measures and RDPs. While pointing towards improvements made, the report is critical in referring to poorly designed schemes and insufficient allocation of resources. BirdLife urges

the European Commission, and national and regional authorities managing RDPs, to seize this chance to make significant and urgent improvements in the implementation of rural development policy, not only to address the EU's pressing environmental problems, but also to provide a more solid base for the continuation of EU spending in this field.

[Find out more](#)

Tourism in the EU: a new survey

A survey was published earlier this year on European's attitudes to tourism, for the European Commission (Directorate-General for Enterprise and Industry). Europe is the world's region most visited by tourists: in fact, six EU countries are in the world's top 10 destinations for holiday-makers. Not surprisingly the sector is very important to the European economy. Besides growth and jobs creation, tourism plays an important role in the development of the vast majority of European regions. Infrastructure created for tourism purposes contributes to local development, and jobs are created or maintained even in areas in industrial or rural decline, or undergoing urban regeneration. In addition, sustainable tourism plays a major role in the preservation and enhancement of the cultural and natural heritage in an ever-expanding number of areas, ranging from arts to local gastronomy, crafts or the preservation of biodiversity.

This Flash Eurobarometer survey collected citizens' views, details of holidays and travel in 2007 and 2008, and their plans regarding

holidays in 2009. It found that the most popular holiday destinations of EU holiday-makers in 2008 were Spain, Italy, France and Greece – and these countries dominate the current plans made for 2009. On average, European tourists prefer value for money (33%) over 'low price' (16%). Safety and security at the destination was important for 13% of respondents and 12% indicated that they usually focus on quality – not necessarily in conjunction with the associated costs.

In addition, according to the survey, when choosing holiday destinations, most Europeans named the actual environment of the location (e.g. its overall attractiveness) as being the major consideration (31%). Cultural heritage (24%) and entertainment possibilities (15%) were the second and third most widespread criterion for choosing a destination. Local culture, lifestyles and traditions were seen as the primary magnets of 'non-conventional' destinations of tourism in Europe, but for budget travellers, cheaper prices might have a role, too.

[Find out more](#)



FIND OUT MORE

WHERE TO FIND OUT MORE

EU Rural Development policy 2007–13:

http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rurdev/index_en.htm

Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development:

http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/index_en.htm

The European Evaluation Network:

http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rurdev/eval/network/index_en.htm

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