

# Innovation in Agriculture, food and forestry in the European Union policies post-2013

## A contribution by ERIAFF Network: The Network of European Regions for Innovation in Agriculture, Food and Forestry

### Premises

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On September the 20<sup>th</sup> 2012, 17 European Regions have gathered in Florence, Italy, for the launching of a common European platform to share experiences and to work jointly on the subject of Innovation and Research in the Agricultural, Food and Forestry domains.

This platform adopts the form of an open institutional network, which is entitled "**European Regions for Innovation in Agriculture, Food and Forestry**" (ERIAFF). The network is established on voluntary contributions by each participant and is open, without any statutory and financial commitments, to further adhesions by European Regional Governments.

Tuscany Region provides the informal secretariat of ERIAFF and engages to represent the network's views before European Institutions and other third parties on the basis of an internal democratic consultation process which considers the view of each involved partner.

ERIAFF Regions wish to emphasize:

- the importance of involving the Regional Governments into the Network of the European Innovation Partnership on Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability as well as into its steering Board as soon as regional authorities are generally in charge of the management of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and key-talking partners of all the stakeholders of their territories,
- that Regions, by organizing themselves into dynamic networks, can improve the performance of the EIP network acting as facilitators of information flow and links between stakeholders across their territories as well as across the European Union.

ERIAFF Regions believe that:

- the productivity and sustainability of agriculture can be addressed only through a **systemic approach**, that is to say considering the entire agricultural and agro-food production chains (from seed to finished product) integrated into their territories,
- the agricultural and agro-food innovation absolutely requires **social innovation** where working conditions of farmers and workers, skills development through training, the development of collective organization, considerations of employment criteria and education on nutrition for consumers are factors not to be neglected,
- innovation should help building up a real economic competitiveness of farms **over the long term**, therefore it necessarily needs to incorporate the **climatic, environmental and human health** dimensions. The soil protection, the optimal management of water, the enhanced energy independence and the development of quality products are all examples of that,
- innovation should help to enhance the nutritional and environmental quality of food productions, while maintaining their level of safety and ensuring sustainable business operations,
- in the context of the CAP reform, the theme of innovation should be one of the drivers to be taken into account for the redistribution of financial resources, in particular for the implementation of the regionalization process. This would help to make the results of the aids granted under the first pillar more efficient and appropriate.

## Innovation, the key word for agriculture in 2020

One of the fundamental tasks of the future rural development policy (CAP 2014-2020) will be to act as a connecting link between research and the world of business.

The new Rural Development Programmes (RDP), resulting from the proposals made by Commissioner Dacian Cioloș, will have the principal aim, across all the measures, of promoting and transferring knowledge and innovation through, amongst other things, the trial and application of the research leading to the new "Horizon 2020" programme and the current planning period (both European and national) in agricultural/forestry companies.

All types of innovation will be included: processes, technologies, practices, services and products.

In this respect, one of the most relevant new items in the new rural development policy is the establishment of the "European Innovation Partnership (EIP) on Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability" (COM(2012) 79 from 29.02.2012) which plans the creation of a European network and a series of Operational Groups (OG) within Member States with the aim of promoting productive and sustainable agriculture.

Furthermore, the Community Budget has planned a specific allocation of funds for agricultural research equal to 4.5 billion Euros, to be managed in accordance with the rules of the Research Framework Programme. In addition, the draft regulations on rural development make the transfer of knowledge and innovation the first of the six general priorities, making it apply across all the rural development objectives and promoting the aggregation of the Measures for consultancy, services and innovation, so they can pursue common objectives.

## Contribution of the Regions

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The Regions that share this document have analysed the proposals made by the European Commission and highlight the following points, for which they commit to adopting common solutions.

**1. European Innovation Partnership on agricultural productivity and sustainability.** This initiative, which aims to promote the transfer of innovation and knowledge through the creation of operational partnerships involving agricultural and agri-food businesses, consultancy and innovation transfer systems and researchers, bases its founding principle on a bottom-up approach to defining the priorities for Research and Innovation in the agricultural sector. In this context, the guiding role of the Regions is crucial, in particular in defining an appropriate way for the "cooperation" RDP measure to function, and in selecting the Operational Groups that best meet the needs of the area.

The opportunities offered as part of the EIP should primarily support projects that are funding networking and cooperation systems which are not supported by any other programme.

**2. Incentives.** So that the push towards innovation can be maximised, the formation of the Operational Groups should be accompanied by the introduction in the Rural Development Plans of a system of incentives in favour of the subjects which apply to the most measures related to innovation (e.g. investments, training, cooperation, pilot schemes, consulting, etc.) with the aim of reinforcing both the horizontal support of the innovation across all the rural development objectives and the role of farmers in the food-chain.

**3. Competitiveness.** Innovation is fundamental for the competitiveness of European agri-food enterprises. The 2<sup>nd</sup> pillar should play a major role in supporting competitiveness through specific measures for the modernisation of agricultural, and forestry sectors. The diversification of farm incomes in different ways, e.g. via renewable energies, should be considered as central elements for the competitiveness of European farmers and of rural areas.

**4. Reserve of financial resources.** The strategy promoted by Europe 2020 for the development of knowledge includes the aim of spending equal to 3% of the European Union's GDP. Rural development should also contribute to this objective through a specific reserve of resources to be directed towards actions that support innovation.

**5. European Collaboration.** The EIP will not be effective without the institution of aggregating processes at a European level between those involved in regional agro-food systems, in order to allow the appropriate identification of the priority areas for action within the programmes supporting Research and Innovation. Use of Information and Communication Technologies would accelerate the potential for collaboration and transfer of knowledge on a European basis.

**6. Common European Research and Innovation Infrastructure.** It is strategically important to bring together on a European scale, the innovation efforts into a common research infrastructure to create the basis for the development of new and advanced technologies and solutions in agriculture, environment and forestry.



## **Institutional strategy**

For the above mentioned reasons, the Regions signed up to the initiative are committed to launching a close technical collaboration, so that the Operational Groups of the agriculture EIP can respond in the best way possible, and in a European context, both to the needs for innovation and knowledge expressed by the rural areas, and to the definition of the priorities for research expressed through the Research Framework Programmes.

With this aim they commit to:

- highlight the common priority topics and ensure transnational cooperation between operational groups which exist in their regions;
- organise periodic opportunities for exchange and discussion, in order to create a European network of OG working on similar topics;
- check (for the Regions with Managing Authority responsibility) the potential offered by the regulatory proposal to finance the working of the EIP operative groups and the possibility for incentives within their Rural Development Plans;
- anticipate future planning by outlining a common proposal for the functioning of the measure supporting operative groups within the EIP;
- reserve a higher percentage, respect to the previous programme, of financial RDP's resources for actions that support innovation;
- simplify the procedures for the action to support innovation;
- promote and support the creation of a European Research Infrastructure under Horizon 2020 in agriculture, environment and forestry that will provide support to joint research activities and cooperation among regional research centres, Academia, scientific communities and by fostering researchers mobility;
- set the innovation as a key word in their technical advice systems.

## **Technical and scientific strategy**

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The Regions, through their planning tools, commit to defining complementary and mutually reinforcing action plans for innovation for the following strategic macro areas:

- a. Strengthening the role of the farmers (and cooperatives) in the agro-food production chain through: the development of new organizational and managerial systems, the improvement of the logistic and the creation of new services to farms and food operators
- b. Improving the processes for the implementation of innovation from the laboratories to the field/farms (technological transfer)
- c. Restructuring of territorial management and organization in rural areas, ensuring economic development in rural areas for a better integration with rural and urban planning
- d. Promoting innovative techniques and technologies for the mitigation and adaptation to Climate Changes, with particular attention to (a) the efficient use of energy, water and genetic resources and (b) the development of innovative methods to fight against new pests and diseases
- e. Making farm and forestry management practices more environmentally and socially sustainable
- f. Improving the quality of foods (better nutritional profile) and food safety

The starting point for confrontation inside the network is a grid for the analysis of possible common interests in the field of agricultural innovation (Annex 1). This grid is a working document which will be consolidated in the coming months and is intended to identify common priorities and possible actions in view of the creation of interregional Operational Groups within the regional Rural Development Plans.

## Regions that have shared the document

Andalusia (ES), Aquitania (FR), Baviera (DE), Bretagne (FR), Catalogna (ES), Centre (FR), Dubrovnik-Neretva (CR), Emilia Romagna (IT), Euskadi (ES), Flevoland (NL), Istria (CR), Liguria (IT), Limburg (NL), Marche (IT), PACA (FR), Pays de la Loire (FR), Picardie (FR), Poitou-Charentes (FR), Wales (UK), Regional Council Satakunta (FI), Regional Council South Ostrobothnia (FI), Toscana (IT), Umbria (IT), Zemgale Planning(LV)