



# Rural Evaluation **NEWS**

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE EUROPEAN EVALUATION HELPDESK FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

## HIGH NATURE VALUE (HNV) FARMING: SAFEGUARDING EUROPE'S BIODIVERSITY

Rising pressures on the environment have made today's EU citizens increasingly more environmentally conscious and recent financial crises have made the public mindful of how money is spent. According to the Eurobarometer survey, EU citizens believe that one of the most important responsibilities of farmers is 'protecting the environment' and that they support rewarding farmers who carry out agricultural practices benefiting the environment<sup>1</sup>.

**S**ince 1990, in 25 European countries the populations of a group of common farmland birds have been reduced by roughly 25% and in some cases as much as 50%<sup>2</sup>. This decrease in bird numbers along with the wider decrease in biodiversity in the EU is largely related to loss of habitat linked to greater agricultural specialisation, increased farming intensity and land abandonment.<sup>3</sup>

This article takes a special look at one particular agri-environmental indicator, High Nature Value (HNV) Farming. It has been adopted as one of the impact indicators for the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)<sup>4</sup> and will be used in assessing the environmental impact of the CAP including the Rural Development Programmes (RDPs). Appropriate monitoring and evaluation of HNV farming helps to make policies more efficient and effective, promoting biodiversity, protecting the environment and providing transparency to EU citizens.



© Concha Salguero

*Latxa sheep grazing a High Nature Value common pasture in Sierra Salvada (Álava, Spain)*



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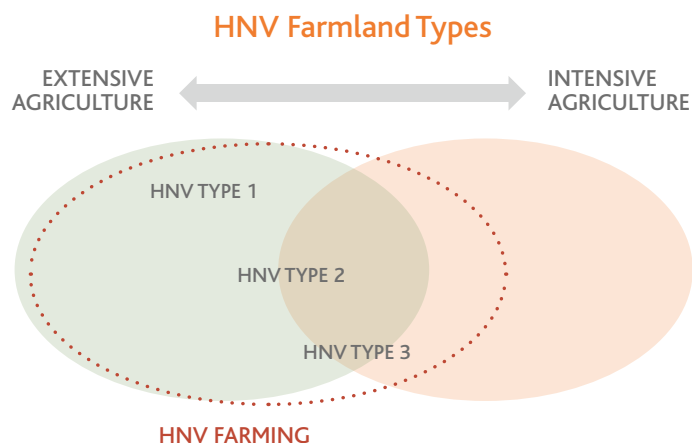


### EVENTS

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> The [European Evaluation Helpdesk for Rural Development](#) interviewed, Zélie Peppiette<sup>5</sup>, who was part of the team responsible for the development of the CAP Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for the period 2014-2020 and has worked on HNV related issues. Zélie illuminates research on the identification and effects of HNV farming systems, the development of a common terminology for describing these systems and the challenges and solutions for the evaluation of this indicator.



Source: Adapted from Opperman et al. 2012

### Land use change and growing concern for biodiversity

The concept of HNV farming originated in the early 1990s from a number of academics and NGO groups concerned about land use change and the recognition that, in general, lower farming intensity tends to support the greatest range of wildlife species and greatest potential for conservation. Research acknowledged that higher levels of biodiversity in the EU were correlated with low intensity farming systems across large areas of the countryside. Earlier academic studies focused on matching biodiversity data with farming systems through mapping and correlating real world structures, in an attempt to find the most robust arrangements to support biodiversity. Researchers traced where the richest areas of biodiversity lay in terms of range and intensity of species/populations, making it possible to begin to codify and postulate

a definition of HNV farming. Zélie describes how researchers and NGOs worked together to show that HNV farming was not an ethereal concept, but 'something real that can be assessed, to show the value and variety of ways it benefits the environment'.

Defining HNV farming allows one to determine to what extent various farm systems exhibit HNV qualities. As research demonstrates that HNV farming systems have an exceptionally positive impact on biodiversity and the environment as a whole, being able to assess both the extent and condition of HNV farmland helps in developing an effective and pro-active policy. As studies continue to show, protecting biodiversity both enhances ecosystem productivity and sustainability but also contributes to creating a resource efficient, greener and more competitive economy, a cornerstone of the Europe 2020 strategy.

### Typifying HNV and its features

Three types of HNV farming became broadly characterised by researchers and recognised by the larger policy community. HNV as a policy concept highlights existing types of farming and farm landscapes that are intrinsically linked to rich biodiversity. HNV farmland is present across European regions and Member States, with a diverse array of types in each.

The central elements of HNV farming are semi-natural pastures, meadows and orchards, as well as peripheral semi-natural features. Semi-natural farmland offers fundamental 'green infrastructure' for wildlife and therefore is central to the preservation and sustainability of ecological networks.

Three key types of HNV farmland in Europe most recognised:<sup>6</sup>

**Type 1:** Farmland with a high proportion of semi-natural vegetation.

**Type 2:** Farmland with a mosaic of low intensity agriculture and natural and structural elements (field margins, hedgerows, stone walls, patches of woodland or scrubs, small rivers, etc.).

**Type 3:** Farmland supporting rare species or a high proportion of European or World populations.

These 3 types of HNV farmland are not rigid classifications with absolute margins separating them, but rather a continuum from areas with more semi-natural vegetation and lower intensity use to those more intensely managed but still supporting relevant factors of conservation worth. These classifications help to build parameters for evaluating the environment and in particular biodiversity.



## A tool to help assess the effects of agriculture on the environment

The 2007-2013 programming period established the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (CMEF) for rural development, including a hierarchy of indicators to be used in the assessment of Rural Development Programmes. Although HNV Farming had already been recognised as one of the Agri-Environmental Indicators developed at the EU level<sup>7</sup>, this was, the 'first time it was enshrined in the European legislative framework as a requirement linked to a policy instrument' indicated Zélie. Now the monitoring and evaluation framework has been extended to cover the CAP as a whole, and HNV farming is included as an impact indicator, and it is also one of the context indicators used in drawing up the territorial analyses around which RDP strategies for 2014-2020 are based. This means that as well as being used in the evaluation of each individual RDP, it will also be used in evaluating the impact of all CAP instruments at EU level.

**'This is a big step forward in improving data collection and our understanding of some of the interactions between agriculture and the environment'.**

HNV is the only CAP impact indicator for which there is no common methodology explicitly provided at the EU level. Instead, recognising the unique composition of the different types of HNV farmland in Member States, and varying importance in assessing different HNV characteristics, and the wide range of data available, common parameters (i.e. definitions of the three HNV farmland types), were agreed to be assessed by each Member State using data and methodologies appropriate to their specific situation. This flexible system allows Member States or regions that have more sophisticated data series, collection methods or capacity to use them, and takes into account different physical, historical and political specificities. Despite criticism of a lack of overall comparability across Member States, it is believed that if the assessment is carried out with the same parameters, using a method that is acknowledged as justifiable for achieving an estimate of HNV area, then it can be aggregated at the EU level and further benefit the regional/national levels. It should further be noted that it is important that each RDP continues to use the same method over a sustained period of time to enable the observation of changes. Zélie reflects that, 'One thing is to know HNV and another is to know what is the right policy to support it. Evaluation helps us to do both. We need to assess where the HNV farmland is and we need to look at the interaction with policy instruments applied'.





*Shepherd with Retinta goats grazing a High Nature Value Quercus pyrenaica woodland in Salamanca (Spain)*

## Recognising the whole system

**'One of the really important things about High Nature Value Farming is that it is about systems, it is not just about what crop or what plant is growing or what's grazing a particular piece of land at one time, or the grazing intensity, it's about the whole interaction of different elements of the farming system'.**

Assessment of the methods used to quantify HNV farmland in the previous programming period found that nearly all Member States were using GIS systems, such as CORINE and Natura 2000, which look at land cover to assess HNV, alone, or in combination with other information. Using these data sources alone, fails to account for the impact of farming systems, and risks misidentification. 'You can have an HNV farming system anywhere. It depends on how you choose to manage your farm', states Zélie. Relying solely on GIS data sources fails to capture the condition of land and changes over time, since many are not updated frequently. From a practical standpoint it is much more difficult and costly to bring something back to an HNV standard than to utilise management practices that maintain what is already present. While the evaluation of HNV farming may seem daunting, we should not give up because it is not easy or foolproof. A better understanding of HNV farming stands to have considerable social and economic benefits for Member States as well as the obvious environmental benefits. 'We can only support HNV farming if we know where it is, and if we know what are the right types of interventions for preserving, enhancing and developing it. So it is important to evaluate the evidence for the impact of particular types of policy interventions in supporting HNV farming' states Zélie. Knowing both the extent and condition of this land is fundamental in targeting interventions and being able to evaluate their worth.

Three important aspects can help Member States achieve better capacity in measuring HNV:

- **Triangulation is your friend:** use a variety of different data sources and methods. This can make assessments not only more robust but capable of measuring both extent and condition, capturing the whole system not just land cover.
- **Don't miss the data right in front of you:** properly assess what data sources are available or may have been overlooked, and how these data sources can be effectively applied.
- **Learn from others:** The opportunity for the transfer of good practices and sharing of experiences between Member States via networking organised at the EU level provides real added value, and should be pursued.

Capacity is building in the Member States in monitoring and evaluating HNV and it is important to continue building this capacity in order to be able to report properly on RDP achievements, have a good basis for evaluating the impact of the whole CAP, meet the requests of citizens, attain more efficient budgets and achieve the greater goal of environmental sustainability. ■

**Learn more about HNV  
in our Back to Basics section!**



## DON'T MISS OUT!

The Evaluation Helpdesk will be conducting a **Good Practice Workshop on the evaluation of HNV in Bonn in June 2016**, to facilitate the sharing of good practices and deepen the understanding of the importance of HNV for protecting biodiversity.

For more information email  
**info@ruralevaluation.eu**



1. 'Special Eurobarometer 440: Europeans, Agriculture and the CAP' European Commission, January 2016
2. [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Agri-environmental\\_indicator\\_-\\_population\\_trends\\_of\\_farmland\\_birds](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Agri-environmental_indicator_-_population_trends_of_farmland_birds)
3. 'The Mid-Term Review of the EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2020' European Commission, 2015.
4. [Commission Implementing Regulation \(EU\) No 834/2014](#)
5. Zélie Peppiette is the Assistant to Mihail Dumitru, Deputy Director General for Rural Development and Research, DG AGRI
6. Opperman et al. 2012
7. [EEA Report No 6/2005](#)





# SHARING EXPERIENCES RELATED TO THE EX POST EVALUATION 2007-2013

Member States are currently in the process of conducting their ex post evaluations for the programming period 2007-2013, with some already available online (e.g. [Finland](#)). Member States will be required to submit their ex post evaluations by 31 December 2016, after which an ex post evaluation summary<sup>1</sup> will be conducted by Commission services.

**T**he purpose of the ex post evaluation is to assess programme impacts and achievements with respect to the funds spent, in order to justify the programme budget and provide greater transparency and accountability of EU rural development policy. The ex post evaluation will build on the mid-term evaluation by attempting to overcome some of the methodological challenges and deficits experienced.

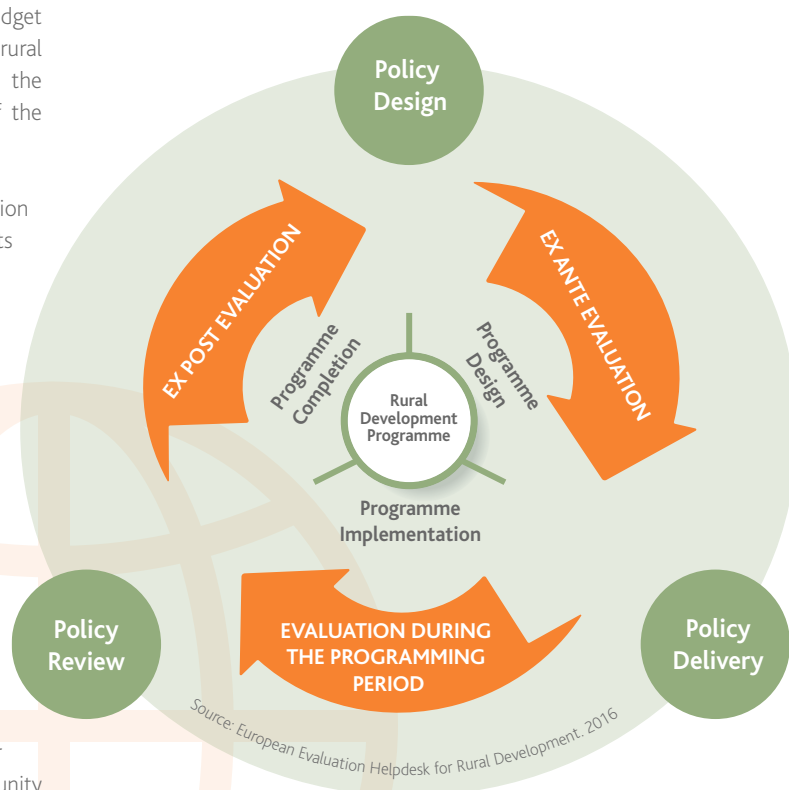
Results of the ex post evaluation contain valuable information for the preparation of the Annual Implementation Reports (AIRs) in 2017 and 2019 and for validating baseline values set for the 2014-2020 programming period. The ex post evaluation is also an important policy learning instrument to improve the design, quality, and implementation of future RDPs. Methodological exchange of best practices between Member States to further build the capacity of conducting ex post evaluations is important to realise useful and robust results.

In order to respond to the increasing request for exchange of practices in relation to the ex post evaluation, the Evaluation Helpdesk, would like to encourage Member States to share their methodological approaches prior to the official submission date. Managing Authorities and evaluators are to highlight interesting evaluation practices and email them to [info@ruralevaluation.eu](mailto:info@ruralevaluation.eu). These good practices will be further expounded upon and made available to the evaluation community to support and improve future evaluations.

Practitioners will be presenting some of their methodological approaches at the Evaluation Helpdesk's Good Practice Workshop, 'Methods for assessing impacts of Rural Development Programmes in the context of the ex post evaluation 2007-2013: Practices and Solutions' in Palermo, Italy in July 2016. This workshop will bring together RDP evaluators, Managing Authorities, and the authors of the *Guidelines for the ex post evaluation of 2007-2013 RDPs* in order to:

- discuss methodological approaches chosen to assess results and impacts of RDPs 2007-2013,
- exchange ideas on the quality of the data used and solutions found to overcome data-gaps,
- test the robustness of findings and answers to evaluation questions and,
- discuss quality criteria for sound evaluation reports. ■

## THE EVALUATION CYCLE



Send your  
questions to:

[info@ruralevaluation.eu](mailto:info@ruralevaluation.eu)



1. Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005, Art. 87 on summary of ex post evaluation



# THE SYNTHESIS OF EX ANTE EVALUATIONS OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES 2014-2020

A synthesis of the 115 ex ante evaluations established for all Rural Development Programmes and national rural network programmes co-financed by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) in the 28 Member States was recently published on the EUROPA website.

It was commissioned by DG Agriculture and Rural Development and carried out throughout the year 2015 by Kantor Management Consultants S.A. In addition to the ex ante evaluation (EAE) reports, the synthesis considered the respective Rural Development Programmes (RDPs), the Partnership Agreements and the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) reports attached to each ex ante evaluation.

The report includes a descriptive chapter, which follows the proposed table of contents for the ex ante evaluations included in the guidelines developed by the former Evaluation Expert Network. For each of the six main components of the ex ante evaluation, the synthesis gives an overview of how these aspects were covered in the EAEs and what the main conclusions and recommendations were. In addition, the synthesis analysed more in-depth four, evaluation themes:

1. 'Process of the ex ante evaluation';
2. 'Intervention logic and internal coherence of RDPs';
3. 'External coherence and added value';
4. 'Specific clusters of actions'.

The last theme covers 6 thematic clusters of measures that are either of particular importance or include new features added in the latest legal framework: (1) Investments (2) Knowledge transfer, advisory services and the European Innovation Partnership (3) Agri-environment-climate (4) Forestry (5) Young farmers, small farmers and areas with natural constraints (6) Risk management. These clusters were assessed on the basis of selected case studies.

Critical remarks about some aspects of the programming and evaluation systems are generally accompanied by examples of good practices. The result is a synthesis report that provides comprehensive insights into the 2014-2020 programming process, as well as useful and forward looking feedback.

## Intervention logic and internal coherence

Taking a closer look at evaluation theme 2, the report found that in the majority of the programmes, the SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis provides a comprehensive and evidence-based picture of the programming area and the ex ante evaluators attest that the RDP objectives are





clearly defined and well related to the needs established through the SWOT analysis and the needs assessment. With regard to the intervention logic, which is the essential basis for further evaluation activities, the assessment was also positive for the vast majority of RDPs. Negative comments made by evaluators did not concern the essence of the intervention logic (with few exceptions) but rather its incomplete or inadequate presentation in the RDP, often found to be too general or insufficiently documented.

Most of the EAEs' findings agree that the logical links between selected measures and programme objectives are very clear. Furthermore, the distribution of respective expenditures was found to be consistent with the programme objectives. The presentation and analysis of the expected impacts is an identified weakness of the RDPs and EAE reports (only 25-30% of the RDPs have been assessed as satisfactory). Result chains presenting links between outputs, results and impacts are missing, as well as logical links between expected impacts and policy objectives. The plausibility of the assumed links between planned actions, outputs and results has not been ascertained for more than half of the RDPs. Deficiencies have been found primarily with regard to the links between expected outputs and results.

The applied indicator system is often not specific enough for evaluating impacts. Monitoring and evaluation plans were assessed as inadequate or even missing from roughly 1/3 of the programmes. This is mostly linked to the fact that at the time of information gathering for the synthesis (May 2015), approximately 60 RDPs were still under development. Developing methodologies for establishing the impacts is often considered a task to be further developed for the monitoring and evaluation

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phase rather than for the phase of RDP design. The main problems and bottlenecks identified in EAEs concerned the setting of a realistic time framework for evaluations and supplying accurate explanations and justifications for monitoring milestones and their target values.

### **External coherence and links with Pillar I**

For the period 2014-2020, rural development is part of an overall EU policy framework established for all European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), governed by a common strategic framework (CSF) to improve coordination and complementarity of the different programmes. At the same time, rural development as Pillar II of the CAP has several links to the income and market support Pillar (Pillar I), and even more so than in the past, at the level of specific measures/payments. It was found that the need for multilevel policy coordination at European, country and regional level constitutes an institutional challenge for some Member States.

54% of the EAE reports confirm that there is consistency and adequate coordination between the two Pillars of the CAP and that coordination mechanisms are outlined. In 46% of the reports, comprehensive information to confirm synergies, identify

potential conflicts and linkages between Pillar I and Pillar II are missing or insufficiently reported.

The existence of an overarching Europe 2020 strategy, followed by Partnership Agreements for each Member State in line with its objectives and targets and establishing the optimal use of the ESIF, has ensured satisfactory coherence of the RDPs with the external policy environment. Coordination and alignment of funds is ensured in 63% of the cases via different mechanisms, such as coordination committees.

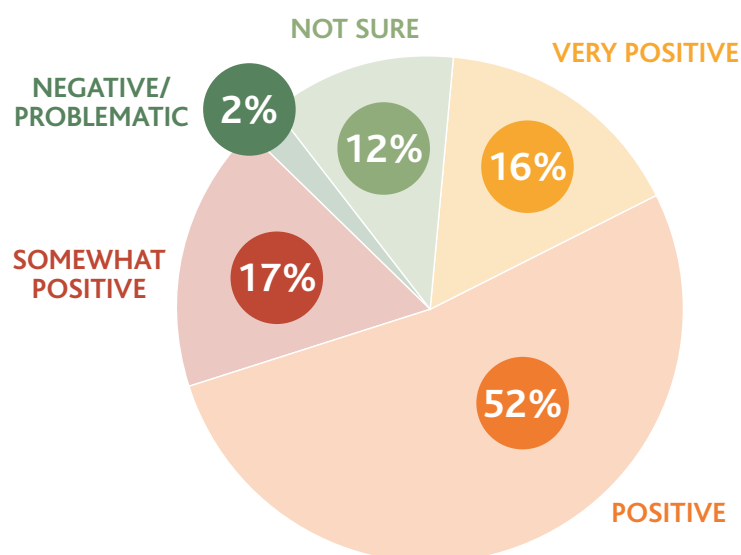
### Key recommendations

Results of a survey conducted among stakeholders (primarily managing authorities (MAs)) shows that the vast majority consider the influence of the EAE recommendations on the RDP design as positive. In nearly 63% of the cases, all recommendations have been fully considered in the design and content of the RDP. Where this was not the case, relevant justifications have been provided. Some MAs had difficulties addressing remarks regarding the quantification of indicators, the prioritisation of findings from the needs assessment and the spatial monitoring of environmental impacts.

Based on the analysis done, the report formulates a list of key recommendations. Most prominent among these recommendations, is the need to further enhance capacity building and peer to peer exchanges between MAs and other actors involved, through workshops, seminars, and dissemination of good practice examples, on topics such as coordination mechanisms and management structures. The Commission is further recommended to continue to develop guidance, specifically regarding the design of the new sub-measures, indicators, and monitoring and evaluation issues. The report also calls for improving the overall presentation of the internal coherence of RDP's and, in particular, to clarify the links between expected outputs and results.

The final '[Synthesis of ex ante Evaluations of Rural Development Programmes 2014-2020](#)' report provides useful intimations for improving the programming, management, monitoring and evaluation of Rural Development Programmes, both at the Member State and EU level. ■

### WHAT WAS THE INFLUENCE OF THE EAE RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE RDP DESIGN?



*European Commission, DG Agricultural and Rural Development,  
SYNTHESIS OF EX ANTE EVALUATIONS OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES 2014-2020.*

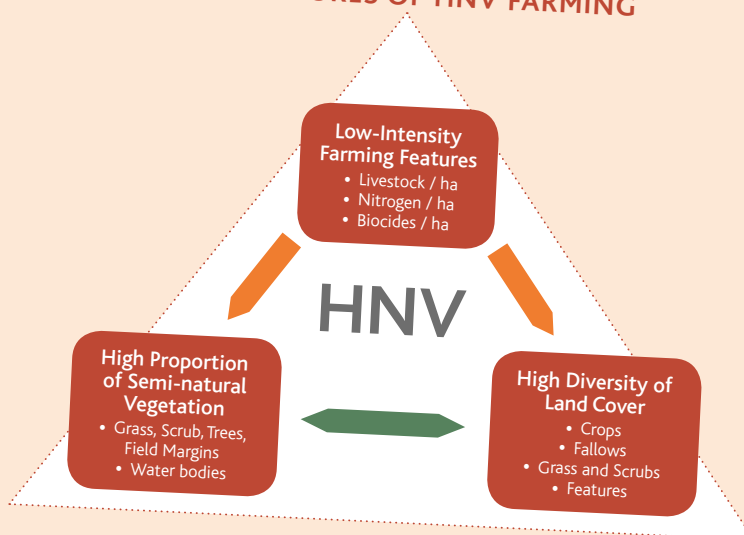




# HIGH NATURE VALUE FARMING

The concept of **High Nature Value (HNV) farming** refers to the causality between certain types of farming activity and corresponding environmental outcomes. The dominant characteristics of HNV farming are its **low-intensity**, significant **presence of semi-natural vegetation** and a **high diversity of land cover (mosaic)**. A high diversity of land cover alone does not indicate HNV farming.

## KEY FEATURES OF HNV FARMING



HNV farming is included as **context indicator no. 36** and as **impact indicator no. 9** in the CAP monitoring and evaluation framework and is defined as the percentage of Utilised Agricultural Area farmed to generate High Nature Value.

HNV will be **assessed a minimum of three times between 2013 and 2023** within each Member State and individual RDP area on the basis of [suitable methods](#) and by making use of common parameters to be measured.

The purpose of this indicator is not to make comparisons between territories on the basis of the extent of HNV land, but rather to

consider the **trends in its preservation and /or enhancement**. It is therefore important that in each territory the same methodology is used for each successive assessment, so that trends are estimated correctly. This does not mean, however, that all Member States must use the same methodology.

HNV as a policy concept is to attract attention to existing types of farming and farm landscapes which are intrinsically linked to biodiversity in order to support the greatest range of wildlife species therefore achieving sustainable agricultural practices, for the benefit and preservation of the environment as whole. ■



# CALENDAR - WHAT'S ON?

## January 2016:

- **LU – 13 January 2016** – Helpdesk capacity building event on the evaluation of LEADER/CLLD. [Read more >>>](#)
- **EL – 19 January 2016** – Helpdesk capacity building event on the CMES. [Read more >>>](#)

## February 2016:

- **IE + UK – 3 February 2016** – Helpdesk capacity building event on the CMES. [Read more >>>](#)
- **IT – 15 February 2016** – Helpdesk capacity building event on the CMES. [Read more >>>](#)
- **NL – 16 February 2016** – Helpdesk capacity building event on the evaluation of LEADER/CLLD. [Read more >>>](#)

- **BE – 16 February 2016** – 3<sup>rd</sup> Meeting of the LEADER/CLLD Sub-group: The Helpdesk presents on why it is so relevant to evaluate LEADER/CLLD and the legal requirements concerning its evaluation. The Helpdesk further introduced its 3<sup>rd</sup> Thematic Working Group on the evaluation of LEADER/CLLD, which will produce guidelines to bolster the capacity of LEADER/CLLD evaluations in the Member States. [Read more >>>](#)

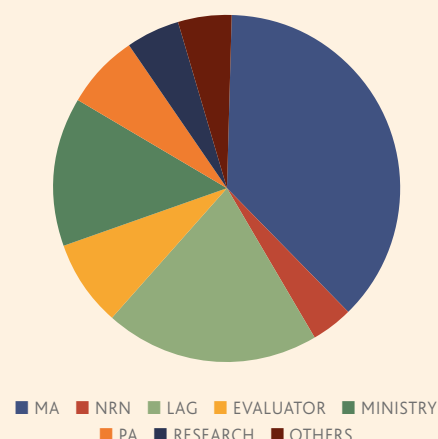
- **EE – 18 February 2016** – Follow up to Helpdesk capacity building event on the CMES. [Read more >>>](#)

- **SI – 29 February/1 March 2016** – 4<sup>th</sup> European Meeting of the NRNs, 2014-2020: Improving RDP Implementation through Networking: The Helpdesk introduces evaluation of NRNs to National Rural Networks 2014-2020 and conducts a group exercise to further reflect on the purpose of evaluation, the involved actors and their responsibilities. [Read more >>>](#)

## March 2016:

- **BE – 4 March 2016** – EU Rural Networks' Steering Group: The Helpdesk presents its capacity building activities to support the evaluation of RDPs, highlighting 'EvaluationWORKS!' its respective activities at Member State, transnational and EU levels, totalling more than 850 participants in all events. The Helpdesk also announced its new annual work programme and thematic work on LEADER/CLLD, as well as events on HNV, ex post evaluation, and NRN evaluation. [Read more >>>](#)

PARTICIPANTS OF EVALUATIONWORKS!  
BY CATEGORY



- **BE – 15-16 March 2016** – Kick-off of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Thematic Working Group on the Evaluation of LEADER/CLLD: The meeting was facilitated by the permanent team of the Evaluation Helpdesk and attended by the drafting experts, peer reviewers and representatives of DG AGRI Unit E.4. As an outcome of the meeting the Thematic Working Group on the evaluation of



LEADER/CLLD was established, the experts introduced to their roles and the basis for the first outline of the guidelines were set. [Read more >>>](#)

#### TWG PRODUCT

#### TARGET AUDIENCE

Guidelines for preparing and implementing the evaluation of LEADER/CLLD at national/regional and local level.

**EU level**  
DG Agri services involved with LEADER/CLLD and evaluation (E4, H1, H3, H5)  
Other DGs and their evaluation support units

**RDP level**  
Mas (RDP and PA), PA, MC, NRNs, evaluators

**LAG level**  
Local action groups  
Evaluators  
NRNs

- **BE – 17 March 2016** – ENRD Workshop on LEADER/CLLD and networking in support of social inclusion: The workshop examines the role of LEADER/CLLD and networking in supporting social inclusion in rural areas. This workshop further emphasised the opportunities provided by RDPs, and discussed approaches, tools and practices for enhancing social inclusion and integrating marginalised groups in rural areas. [Read more >>>](#)

- **FR – 23 March 2016** – Helpdesk capacity building event on the CMES and setting up the system to answer EQs. [Read more >>>](#)

#### April 2016:

- **DE – 21-22 April 2016** - Quality of evaluation-methodological and technical challenges, perspectives, instruments: This event is organised by the German Evaluation Society (DeGeval). [Read more >>>](#)

#### May 2016:

- **BE – 24 May 2016** – 9<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Expert Group on Monitoring and Evaluating the CAP: The Helpdesk presents on its new annual work programme, the publication of new Guidelines, the 3rd Thematic Working Group on LEADER/CLLD and the results of the 2015 Yearly Capacity Building events. [Read more >>>](#)

#### June 2016:

- **DE – 7-8 June 2016** – Good Practice Workshop on High Nature Value (HNV): organised by the Evaluation Helpdesk and The German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (Bundesamt für Naturschutz – BfN). [Read more >>>](#)

#### July 2016:

- **IT – 4-5 July 2016** – Good Practice Workshop on the ex post evaluation 2007-2013: organised by the Evaluation Helpdesk and the Italian Rural Network. [Read more >>>](#)

## CHECK IT OUT!

Revised List of Common Context Indicators!

The European Commission, DG Agriculture and Rural Development, has recently updated the [context indicators](#) with the latest figures available at the end of 2015.



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The Evaluation Helpdesk works under the supervision of Unit E.4 (Evaluation and studies) of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development.

*The contents of this newsletter do not necessarily express the official views of the European Commission.*

### European Evaluation Helpdesk for Rural Development

BE-1040 Brussels, Boulevard Saint Michel 77-79 (Métro Montgomery/Thieffry) **E-mail:** [info@ruralevaluation.eu](mailto:info@ruralevaluation.eu) • **Website:** <http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/evaluation/> • **Tel.** +32 2 737 51 30 • **Newsletter Editorial Team:** Valérie Dumont, Myles O. Stiffler, Hannes Wimmer • **Graphic design:** Karott' SA • **Contributors:** Blanca Casares, Valérie Dumont, Fernando Fonseca, Teresa Marques, Zélie Peppiette, Caroline Raes, Myles O. Stiffler, Hannes Wimmer

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