

## The implementation of the National Rural Network's Specific Programme in 2016: a summary for the benefit of citizens

### ⌘ The National Rural Network: who is it for, and why?

The idea of a rural network is a **European initiative** which aims to develop, share and provide information so as to be a sounding board for all initiatives which relate to rural development. Rural areas are regarded as “*less densely populated areas, (...) rural areas can be regarded as urban society's most precious areas,*” stated the geographer Martin Vanier during one of the highlights of the rural network in 2016.

The National Rural Network (RRN) contributes to discussions and debates about rural areas and policies that further their development. It organises **discussions** between stakeholders and develops **relevant local practices** in conjunction with regional rural networks. Finally, it liaises with the European Rural Development Network (ERDN), alongside other Member States. Local food governance, agro-ecology, the circular economy, the social and cooperative economy, the link between rural and urban environments: these are the principal shared issues, on the subject of which the RRN facilitates meetings between stakeholders involved in the sustainable development of rural areas (elected representatives, administration, associations, syndicates, businesses, etc.).

### ⌘ In real terms, what has it achieved in 2016?

**2016 was characterised by the production of the first operational resources. This year, links were also re-established with regional networks, which have breathed new life into the newly-organised regions, and with the implementation of regional rural development programmes. In 2016, the visibility of the RRN was reflected in initiatives open to those involved (seminars, etc.) and in initial topical output, after the commissioning of the Network which characterised activities in 2015.**

### ⌘ Meetings

Although the activities visible to the general public primarily took the form of the organisation of 2 seminars on 30<sup>th</sup> June and 1<sup>st</sup> July 2016 (the National Network Seminar and a seminar devoted to the European Innovation Partnership), which were attended by 2 ministers responsible for agriculture and the rural community and the deputy director of the European Commission's Rural Development DG, regular meetings of the stakeholders involved and their representatives were conducted in order to implement the action plan. In addition to a monthly meeting of this network's 3 leaders (the Ministry of Agriculture, the Secretariat for the Equality of Territories, and the French Regions Organisation), a one-off monitoring committee was convened on the 20<sup>th</sup> October 2016, a LEADER advisory committee in May 2016, a PEI (European Innovation Partnership) advisory committee in October 2016 as well as 2 Rural Network committees (in April and November).

## **Local Action Groups (GAL) are gradually emerging**

LEADER: throughout France, there are close to 350 GALs in 2014-2020, as opposed to 222 in 2007-2013. The RRN is proposing to improve and facilitate the implementation of projects through networking between long-standing and new GALs and through a jointly designed set of tools. On 31<sup>st</sup> December 2016, 333 of these were selected by the regional management authorities. The year 2016 was devoted to the drafting of documents for managing the various LEADER sub-measures within the framework of a LEADER working group which brings together all the French Regions, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food, the Services and Payments Agency and the French Regions Organisation. Concerning LEADER cooperation, work was begun on the future steps to be taken during 3 meetings, one (in March 2016) with the Association Nationale des Pays et des Petr (National Association of Areas and Centres for Regional and Local Equilibrium) and two others during LEADER France General Meetings (June and September 2016). This year, two documents produced at the end of the programme for 2007-2013 were concerned with the capitalisation and upgrading of good practices within the LEADER framework; they were translated into English so that they could be shared more effectively with the various Member States: 24 case studies of GAL projects relating to rural development, and one study of the implementation of LEADER cooperation in France and of how to proceed with this cooperation in the years to come.

The National Rural Network has equally participated in LEADER/CLLD (Community-led Local Development) European institution sub-group meetings in February 2016.

## **A growing PEI (European Partnership for Innovation) network which participates in European discussions**

Fifty French experts are involved in the PEI's 23 European network "Focus groups" (supported by the FEADER). French stakeholders also play a major role in 13 of the 16 "thematic networks" selected within the context of the Horizon 2020 research policy between 2014 and 2016. National coordination of the PEI is particularly active in terms of upgrading and developing links between the PEI's regional, national and European activities. In 2016, 19 calls for PEI task group projects were launched as part of 15 rural development programmes. 48 task groups were active on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2016 in 6 different Regions (7 PDRs).

These partnerships seek innovations which respond to the practical needs of farmers and forestry workers, through the sharing of skills, the application of research, experimentation and discussions between researchers and those working in the field (interactive and bottom-up).

These innovations relate to the challenges facing society. Half of the projects contribute to the agro-ecological transition.

Themes for innovation are: developments in farming practices and systems, plant and animal health, water management and soil quality, sustainable economic development through diversification, the bio-economy, supply chains, self-sufficiency in proteins, etc.

## **Collective action projects for rural development (MCDR) which are producing their first results**

16 projects were ongoing in 2016, within the context of the MCDR call for projects, involving around 150 stakeholders within the domains of agricultural development, research and the environment, as well as several businesses and non-agricultural organisations. It is perhaps worth noting that in 2016, for example, a MOOC (Massive Online Open Course) was published online,

and sites for sharing information and methodological guides have already been produced. On 7<sup>th</sup> April 2016, an “Agora” day was organised to present these national MCDR projects and their initial activities. A summary of this event was produced.

### ☞ Initial themed seminars for improving the implementation of regional rural development programmes

3 national seminars were organised in 2016 under the banner of the Rural Network: a Rural Network national seminar, a European Partnership for Innovation seminar and finally a seminar on the agro-environmental measures which resulted in the emergence of a European network based on this issue.

For more information: <http://www.reseaurural.fr/le-reseau/activit%C3%A9s/%C3%A9v%C3%A8nements-s%C3%A9minaires>

### ☞ Training in the use of ODR data to enhance stakeholder involvement

The Observatory for Rural Development is a database administered by INRA which is equipped with various software packages for data mining, synthesis and processing, which make it an effective system for finding information on rural development and a tool for the monitoring and forecasting of rural, and particularly community-based, development policy, ranging from the local to the national level. **3 training days were organised in 2016 to allow stakeholders to familiarise themselves with this tool.** This initiative is set to continue.

The ODR's website : [https://esrcarto.supagro.inra.fr/intranet/carto\\_joomla/](https://esrcarto.supagro.inra.fr/intranet/carto_joomla/)

### ☞ Communications supplied with a higher density of projects for keeping the general public informed

6 newsletters were published in 2016. They include a monthly figure that reflects the rural development policy being implemented in France. A photographic campaign was conducted in 2016; its aim was to raise the profile of regions in order to showcase 10 projects promoted by stakeholders from 9 Regions, in some cases through using a LEADER or PEI approach.

An exhibition of these images was displayed during the June seminars. A leaflet and a video presenting the Network were also made available.

### ☞ Using the Rural Network, as a local stakeholder or as an ordinary citizen

#### **I am involved in local development, how can I make use of the Rural Network?**

It allows me to get in touch with other stakeholders who have already completed projects similar to what I have in mind, or with whom I might be able to build mutually supportive relationships that will help me make progress with my projects. Regional and national calls for projects also allow me to benefit from funding for launching projects.

#### **I am an ordinary citizen, how can I make use of the Rural Network?**

One of the objectives of this network is to increase the general public's awareness of rural and agricultural development. The tools that have been developed allow access to information on rural development, raise awareness regarding current changes and innovations within the agricultural and rural domain, and provide opportunities to take advantage of the expertise available on the Observatory for Rural Development's websites: [https://odr.supagro.inra.fr/intranet/carto\\_joomla](https://odr.supagro.inra.fr/intranet/carto_joomla) and on the Rural Network's website: <http://www.reseaurural.fr/>

In addition, the national seminars are open to everyone.

## **I am a stakeholder who is more involved in the urban environment: is the Rural Network of any relevance to me?**

Yes, the Rural Network also aims to promote the link between rural and urban environments; joint projects may be envisaged at both regional and national levels; for example, this link is being strengthened by both the RnPAT (National Network for Regional Food Projects) project, designed and promoted jointly with Terres en Villes, and the AGIS project for “greater participation to promote the setting up of farms”, promoted by Terre de Liens. The innovations promoted by these stakeholders in rural and agricultural development are valuable and may also inspire urban stakeholders. Cooperation between those involved is also widely encouraged by the Network.

## **I am a farmer, what sort of contact could I have with the Rural Network?**

Through the stakeholders represented in the Regional Network or through the federations represented at a national level, the Rural Network lends its support to innovative agricultural projects involving farms. For example, this is the case regarding the project promoted by the SUACI Montagn’Alpes, “PASTO: support for agro-pastoralism as a territorialised economy in a mountainous area”, “USAGES: innovation through practice, a driving force for agro-ecology and rural dynamics” promoted by Atelier Paysan and also “DEAPNA: developing agricultural entrepreneurship so as to meet the challenges of generational renewal in the agricultural environment” promoted by the Cooperative for Setting up in Traditional Agriculture in the *département* of the Vendée. These projects constitute effective vehicles for dissemination and discussion regarding current innovations in the agricultural sector.

## **What is the connection between the National Rural Network and the Regional Rural Networks?**

Regional Rural Networks (RRR) are set up by regional councils. They seek to bring together the regional stakeholders within their own areas who are affected by the Rural Development Programme (PDR). The National Rural Network (RRN) is intended to be the “Regions’ crossroads”, providing a place for co-construction. It plays a detecting, identifying and transferring role, since the answers to problems encountered in one area may sometimes be found elsewhere.

## **What connection is there with Europe?**

The National Rural Network acts as an intermediary between European and Regional levels. Its national team participates in the European Rural Network, along with other Member States’ networks, and establishes connections between its activities and those of the Regional Rural Networks. In this way, it helps to increase the exchange of ideas and experiences and encourages French stakeholders to have a broader perspective on what is happening in other countries.

## **How do I contact the Rural Network?**

A directory of Regional Network contacts and an interactive map is available at the following link:  
<http://www.reseaurural.fr/le-reseau/reseaux-ruraux-regionaux>

**Contact:** [contact@reseaurural.fr](mailto:contact@reseaurural.fr)