



Background

Territorial cooperation for the provision of public goods:

better delivery, better value for money, less red tape

It's probably fair to say that almost all stakeholders involved in the CAP Reform process have been disappointed by the outcomes, in particular when it comes to increasing the environmental performance of agriculture. The so-called greening component of the Direct Payment System is considered by the green NGOs and green political parties as merely greenwashing, while farmers complain that the complexity of the greening measures will increase their administrative burden considerably.

There seems to be an overall consensus that the greening of the First Pillar of the CAP will do little to halt the loss of biodiversity and agricultural landscapes, to mitigate climate change or to improve soil, air and water quality.

Some even fear that the greening measures will be counter-productive, in the sense that there is a risk that farmers will be discouraged to further engage in agri-environmental-climate actions under Pillar II.

So, is it all gloom and doom?

One positive aspect is the growing number of farmers across Europe engaged in bottom-up initiatives to combine economically viable agricultural production with enhanced (i.e. above and beyond legally required measures) actions. These initiatives have demonstrated that they can improve the overall sustainability of farming, and achieve better delivery of public goods such as landscape and biodiversity management.

These farmers represent a cross section of the existing diversity of farming systems in Europe: organic and non-organic; intensive and extensive production; small farms and large(r) farms; dairy, beef and arable farmers and fruit and vegetable growers; farmers in highly productive regions and farmers in areas with natural constraints.

These farmers have – from practice – come to understand that performance can be greatly improved by working together at territorial level, instead of doing so on a strictly individual basis.

These collaborative, territorial approaches can take many shapes and sizes. They usually involve intensive discussions with local and national officials, to come to agreements on greater self-organisation and self-governance (contracts, monitoring, sanctioning) of these approaches. Many of them also involve close collaboration with researchers and with green NGOs.

Under Pillar II of the new CAP these groups of farmers (and other land users) can now act collectively as beneficiaries for European funding from the EAFRD budget. There are also opportunities – under Article 35 – to fund the creation of such territorial cooperation initiatives.

This has inspired the Groupe de Bruges – in close collaboration with the French Ministry for Agriculture, Food and Forests and the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs – to bring together territorial bottom-up cooperation initiatives from across Europe.

Representatives of these initiatives from 12 Member States, and numerous other stakeholders (researchers, green NGOs, farmers organisations, government officials) have [gathered twice](#) over the last year to exchange experiences and best practices. Based on this they have formulated a [common manifesto](#) and a [common work programme](#).

These bottom-up territorial cooperation initiatives intend to form a European network to implement the programme, to develop further similar initiatives, to disseminate the concepts of coordinated and collaborative territorial action, and to propose adaptations of the CAP and other relevant European and national policies to support these initiatives. A *Steering Group* has been set up to further prepare this in the coming year.

The main objective of the meeting on 1 December is to show that across Europe a growing number of bottom-up initiatives of groups of farmers of all types and sizes – in collaboration with other land users, NGOs, researchers and policy makers – are working together to make agriculture more sustainable, with greater care for biodiversity and landscape management, through coordinated and collaborative territorial actions.

Based on practical experiences over recent years, they hold the view that coordinated and collaborative territorial actions will:

- substantially increase the effectiveness of policy instruments to promote sustainability of agriculture and the delivery of public goods
- achieve better delivery and therefore better value for tax payers' money
- reduce the administrative burden for both farmers and government institutions
- promote creative and innovative cooperation between these actions and other stakeholders (green NGOs, civil society organisations, researchers)
- unlock greater willingness of larger numbers of farmers to engage in actions above and beyond legal requirements to improve sustainability of their production and management of public goods.