

30 April 2017

**Subject: Opinion of the Finnish Rural Policy Council's Secretariat concerning the public consultation of the EU Commission on the future of the common agricultural policy****Background**

On 2 February 2017 the Commission launched a public consultation on the future of the common agricultural policy (CAP). The consultation was conducted by a questionnaire accessible to all on the web. The questions were concerned with the needs of the future agricultural policy and the efficiency and performance of the current policy. The questionnaire could be accompanied by a document where the organisation presents its opinion.

**Opinion****The Secretariat of the Rural Policy Council of Finland (MANE) states the following with regard to the next programming period of the EU**

The common agricultural policy of the EU must be a policy that supports rural sustainability and efforts to take the best advantage of the opportunities of the rural areas to enhance wellbeing and sustainable growth.

**To achieve the objective:**

1. Economic activities in the rural areas are diversified and renewed. Employment is improved by boosting the competitiveness of enterprises, new entrepreneurship and forms of enterprise, and networking of enterprises.
2. Rural viability and quality of life is enhanced by strengthening the LEADER actions that involve all rural actors and by developing villages and services and improving the access to services.
3. The bioeconomy and circular economy are promoted. The conditions for economically, socially, culturally and ecologically sustainable and ethically acceptable agriculture must exist in all regions of the EU.
4. The administrative burden of the implementation of the policy must be reduced at all levels.
5. Rural proofing is conducted and taken into account in the preparation and implementation of EU policies, especially at the regional and local level.

**Rationale and measures**

A condition for wellbeing and sustainable growth is a diverse structure of economic activities and viable enterprises. Cooperation and networks are also needed to increase competitiveness. In view of the rapid changes in the operating environment, increasing the competitiveness of the rural areas requires renewal and new kinds of solutions. To preserve the viability of the countryside young people must be willing to engage in rural occupations. This means that systems are needed to ensure transfers of enterprises to the next generation and to secure the opportunities for education and training. It is important to have support schemes for rural enterprises also in the future.

Methodologies such as LEADER in the different funds have shown good performance and impact. The methodology is truly close to the citizens and the action is visible, trustworthy and easy to understand. In the next programming period a genuinely local,



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community-based development method, Community-led local development CLLD, must be incorporated into the EU legislation, where funds could be used from all European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF). Funding available from the ESIFs would be put together for use by the CLLD group, thus enabling diverse development of the rural and urban areas. The Member States must allocate 10% of the funding from the ESIFs to CLLD.

Rural development requires the development of services and villages, functioning broadband connections, strengthening competence, and cooperation and wellbeing of different population groups. More comprehensive preventive measures are needed to promote the wellbeing of rural residents. Preventive measures should be taken, for example, to prevent social exclusion and improve service provision in the regions

The EU policy reform should offer more intelligent food and agriculture systems than we have at present. The policy would be more environmentally sustainable, both for us and for the rest of the world, healthier for the consumers, and fairer for the agricultural producers and rural communities. Conditions for agricultural production must be secured for all EU Member States.

The means for climate change mitigation and adaptation are local - there is no single solution that fits all. The common agricultural policy must encourage to the creation of decentralised, local food and energy systems. Agroecological symbiosis is one example of this. Decentralised local systems are also flexible with regard to changes taking place in the environment. The programme framework must enable the implementation of sustainable measures to promote forest management.

Strategic approach must be strengthened in the future EU policy. There must also be longer-term objectives and development tools in use that go beyond individual programming periods. The countryside cannot depend on the EAFRD alone. The Partnership Agreement must set out how rural development is supported from the different funds. Similarly to the Partnership Agreement, the EU Commission and Member States should be allowed to agree on the key objectives, and appropriate monitoring would be in place to follow their achievement.

When concerned with the same type of actions, considerable simplification, reduction and harmonisation is needed in the legislation on the funds. The current EU legislation is highly detailed with multiple stages. Simplification in individual Member States is not possible if the level of detail in the EU rules is too high. Control should be more risk-based. The Member States cannot simplify their implementation unless genuine simplification takes place in the EU rules as well.

In the future there should be two pillars in the EAFRD to enable comprehensive development of the rural areas. The EAFRD has a vital role as the integrating element between agricultural policy and rural development policy.

Rural proofing has proven a well-functioning tool for the preparation of decisions and policies when the decision or policy has regional or local impact. Rural proofing offers information to the decision makers and contributes to the fair treatment of the rural residents. In Cork-declaration 2.0, the rural proofing mechanism is considered to promote rural prosperity.

Finland emphasizes that rural proofing is a useful tool to make rural perspective apparent and, therefore, it should be applied to the implementation of EU policies at the regional and local level.