

**Project number:** 6048  
**Funding source:** EU 7<sup>th</sup> Framework

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## RURAGRI



RURAGRI  
ERA-NET

### Key external stakeholders:

National agriculture and rural development research funding agencies; EU Commission; researchers engaged in research considering the intersections between agriculture and rural development.

### Practical implications for stakeholders:

The outcome of this research includes:

- Development of a Strategic Research Agenda covering issues concerning socio-economic development of diverse types of rural areas, land use management with regard to the production of food, fuel and public goods, and ecosystem services derived from agricultural practices.

### Main results:

The work coordinated and undertaken by Teagasc supported both the development of an EU-wide Strategic Research Agenda in the area of sustainable agriculture and rural development and the development of the Call for Research to address this agenda, which was subsequently funded by the RURAGRI partners to the value of €5 million.

### Opportunity / Benefit:

The primary benefit of involvement in RURAGRI rested in the capacity to influence the development of a trans-national strategic research agenda in the area of sustainable agriculture and rural development. A secondary benefit, though no less important, rested in the creation of opportunities for researchers in Teagasc and Irish universities to engage with and participate in international research consortia

### Collaborating Institutions:

France: Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique; Ministère de l'Agriculture, de l'Agroalimentaire et de la Forêt; The French National Research Agency.

Austria: Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management (BAMF)

Belgium: Institute for Agricultural and Fisheries Research

Cyprus: Agricultural Research Institute

Germany: Federal Ministry of Education and Research; Project Management Jülich

Hungary: Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Institute of Economics

Italy: Italian Ministry of Agricultural Food and Forestry Policies

Israel: Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development

Latvia: Latvian Academy of Sciences

Lithuania: Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Lithuania

Poland: Institute of Horticulture

Slovenia: Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology

Spain: National Institute for Agricultural and Food Research and Technology (INIA)

Sweden: Swedish Research Council for Environment, Agricultural Sciences and Spatial Planning

Switzerland: Swiss Federal Office for Agriculture

The Netherlands: Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality; Stichting Dienst Landbouwkundig Onderzoek

Turkey: General Directorate of Agricultural Research and Policy

Scotland: Rural and Environment Science and Analytical Services - Scottish Government

Denmark: Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries, The Danish AgriFish Agency

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### 1. Project background:

Despite the common nature of many of the challenges confronting farming and rural communities across Europe, research concerned with these challenges is mostly funded through national or regional programs that are weakly integrated with those of neighbouring countries/regions or places facing similar challenges. RURAGRI aims to improve coordination between on-going and future European, national and regional research programmes concerned with new or evolving relationships between rural areas and agriculture in Europe, with particular consideration being given to the challenge of sustainable development.

Research funding bodies from 20 European Member States and several Associated Countries, e.g. Israel, established RURAGRI with funding support from the EU 7th Framework Programme (FP 7, CA 235175) for the development of the European Research Area (ERA). RURAGRI consisted of 24 partners and commenced on the 1st October 2009. The objective of the ERA-NET scheme is to enhance the cooperation and coordination of research activities carried out at national or regional level in the Member States and Associated States. The work of the network focused four key objectives;

1. Map existing EU and national research programmes in the areas of agriculture, rural development and sustainable development, characterise their main features and identify key differences.
2. Elaborate a common research agenda and identify potential synergies between consortium partner countries to improve their research capacity
3. Implement joint activities for selected research programmes
4. Establish appropriate governance and financial mechanisms which would enhance the initiation and implementation of a common research programme

The aim of this work was the identification of areas for potential collaboration between Member States through the agreement of a common research agenda, identification of priority actions and funding of a small number of trans-national collaborative research projects.

Teagasc's role in RURAGRI was that of a Work Package Leader with responsibility for supporting enhanced coordination and cooperation between members of the network (Objective Three above). Teagasc was also a member of the RURAGRI Steering Committee and Management Committee.

The workpackage comprised the identification of priority research topics of interest to the RURAGRI Partners; evaluation of the state of the art in these priority areas with a view to identifying knowledge gaps; and the identification of a suitable spatial typology of rural areas that might facilitate enhanced co-ordination and cooperation between regions facing similar challenges.

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### 2. Questions addressed by the project:

Though RURAGRI was not a research project, the workpackage for which Teagasc was responsible, was guided by the following questions:

- a. Of the broad research challenges set out in the RURAGRI Strategic Research Agenda (SRA) which specific issues were considered priorities by the Network partners? For a copy of the SRA see: [https://www.ruragri-era.net/results?lwt\\_192cmd=download&lwt\\_192id=214](https://www.ruragri-era.net/results?lwt_192cmd=download&lwt_192id=214)
  - b. What research has already been carried out on the priority topics and where are the key knowledge gaps that could be met through coordinated action on the part of the RURAGRI consortium?
  - c. Could cooperation and coordination be enhanced amongst members of the consortium through the use of spatial typologies that would highlight similarities in the challenges faced by regions in their respective countries?
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### 3. The experimental studies:

The first task focused on the specification and prioritisation of research priorities identified in the RURAGRI Strategic Research Agenda. A survey was undertaken among RURAGRI partners in order to identify key research topics. This activity was coordinated with another workpackage, led by the Austrian

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Partner, to facilitate collection of information from partners on their willingness to fund research in priority areas.

The second task was to, within the context of the RURAGRI strategic framework, identify critical knowledge gaps. An overview of completed and on-going research was undertaken through an analysis of published academic papers indexed in a scientific database. The focus of this work was on the identification of knowledge gaps in the priority areas identified in the previous task.

The final task within this workpackage introduced a novel approach to the challenge of enhancing cooperation and coordination between two or more Member States by identifying extant spatial typologies describing sub-national (regional) similarities and differences in socio-economic and environmental characteristics. The objective of this task was to facilitate enhanced co-operation and co-ordination of research between RURAGRI Partners by identifying regions across the EU that are faced with similar challenges and opportunities.

#### 4. Main results:

The work undertaken in the Teagasc-led workpackage results in key contributions that were essential to support the development of the Call for Proposals under a subsequent workpackage.

The survey identified the specific research areas and topics that RURAGRI partners were willing to fund. Attention to rural diversity emerged as the preferred cross-cutting issue in the topics that obtained the highest ranking in each priority theme. These topics include:

- Ecosystem Services and Public Goods (ESPG): “Identify the various types and quality of ecosystem goods and services in different rural areas and improve monitoring systems of goods and services to ensure their sustainability”.
- Socio Economic development (SE): “Identify barriers that hinder innovation and evaluate novel mechanisms and socio-economic structures (networks) which encourage innovation in rural areas”.
- Land Use Management (LUM): “Explore and evaluate innovative land use and management practices to overcome conflicting demands on land and identify best practices”.

The assessment of extant research in these areas highlighted a number of knowledge gaps of interest to the RURAGRI consortium:

- At the time of the assessment it was found that most research concerned with Ecosystem Services and Public Goods was published by those working in environmental sciences, ecology and agriculture. These issues were also considered, to a limited extent, by geographers and economists. The latter research had a greater interdisciplinary element that was missing from much of the research undertaken by other disciplines. It is evident that more trans-disciplinary research is needed addressing the development of agro-system functionality that will satisfy evolving and emerging societal requirements for public goods. There is a particular need to consider areas and regions that are strongly influenced by strong rural-urban relationships.
- At the time of the assessment of research concerning socio-economic development it was found that rural innovation processes had not been given much consideration. Issues concerning rural population change, though much commented on, had received limited attention whereas issues concerning agriculture change and diversification dominated the published literature. Research is required to evaluate the barriers to rural innovation, the impact of migration processes on rural innovation and connections between agricultural specialisation and globalisation. With regard to the latter, issues concerned with the governance of agricultural production, covering food, fuel and public goods, need to be considered with respect to different types of rural areas in order to identify the variety of outcomes to common or global processes.
- The assessment of published literature in the area of Land Use Management identified a critical gap with regard to trans-disciplinary research considering the process of land use change and, in particular, the need to understand how improved governance frameworks could support the resolution of differences between competing land uses and their associated stakeholder groups.

There is a need to address the spatial diversity of rural regions, and at the same time for identifying generic issues of European relevance, as opposed to local particularities. The use of sub-national spatial typologies offers the potential to enhance international co-operation through establishing a framework for comparing

research results among different countries. There is a large body of research on regional spatial typologies in Europe. Of particular relevance to the concerns of RURAGRI are two typologies that describe the spatial variation and characteristics of ecosystem services, public goods and land use (the EU-LUPA typology - [http://www.espon.eu/export/sites/default/Documents/Projects/AppliedResearch/EU-LUPA/Interim\\_report\\_EU-LUPA\\_June\\_2011.pdf](http://www.espon.eu/export/sites/default/Documents/Projects/AppliedResearch/EU-LUPA/Interim_report_EU-LUPA_June_2011.pdf)) and, socio-economic characteristics and trajectories (the EDORA structural typology - ).

[http://www.espon.eu/export/sites/default/Documents/Projects/AppliedResearch/EDORA/EDORA\\_Draft\\_Final\\_Report\\_Version\\_2.4\\_April\\_2010.pdf](http://www.espon.eu/export/sites/default/Documents/Projects/AppliedResearch/EDORA/EDORA_Draft_Final_Report_Version_2.4_April_2010.pdf)

## 5. Benefit:

1. The Teagasc-led workpackage acted as a bridge between the development of the Strategic Research Agenda and the publication of a call for research proposals.
2. Specific research topics were identified as being of interest to a substantial number of the participants in RURAGRI resulting in the provision of a total of €5 million to support research in the priority areas identified.
3. The assessment of extant research in each of the priority areas facilitated the further refinement and specification of issues to be addressed by research proposals.
4. The identification of extant typologies that facilitated those developing research proposals to identify regions with similar characteristics or challenges resulted in the development of new or expanded research networks.
5. From an Irish perspective, the funding made available through the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine and Teagasc facilitated participation in two of the five projects that were funded under the RURAGRI call for research.
6. A meeting organised by Teagasc saw representatives of 20 national funding agencies travel to Ireland for a three day meeting which resulted in finalisation of the research budget and funding arrangements. Following the meeting, feedback from participants was positive with most commenting on the professionalism of the meeting organisation and the positive atmosphere created to support the conclusion of a sensitive stage the network's work.
7. The strategic research agenda has been influential in shaping the call for research in a number of key areas within the EU Horizon 2020 programme.

## 6. Dissemination:

### Main publications:

Meredith, D., Salas Olmedo, M.H., Arriaza, M. and Dax, T. (2012). Final report arising from work undertaken on Work Package 4. [https://www.ruragri-era.net/results?lwt\\_192cmd=download&lwt\\_192id=215](https://www.ruragri-era.net/results?lwt_192cmd=download&lwt_192id=215)

Meredith, D. and Salas Olmedo, M.H. (2012). Understanding the potential role of spatial typologies in responding to the RURAGRI Call. [https://www.ruragri-era.net/results?lwt\\_192cmd=download&lwt\\_192id=216](https://www.ruragri-era.net/results?lwt_192cmd=download&lwt_192id=216)

Johansson, S., Loetscher, M., Meredith, D. et al. (2012). RURAGRI Strategic Research Agenda. [https://www.ruragri-era.net/results?lwt\\_192cmd=download&lwt\\_192id=214](https://www.ruragri-era.net/results?lwt_192cmd=download&lwt_192id=214)

## 7. Compiled by: David Meredith